

DANIEL HARVEY HILL AND HIS CONTRIBUTION TO THE BATTLE OF  
CHICKAMAUGA

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MASTER OF MILITARY ART AND SCIENCE  
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## ABSTRACT

DANIEL HARVEY HILL AND HIS CONTRIBUTION TO THE BATTLE OF CHICKAMAUGA, by MAJ Terrence W. Maki, JR, 113 pages.

This study investigates Major General Daniel Harvey Hill's performance during the Chattanooga campaign, focusing specifically on the Battle of Chickamauga. Hill's early life and performance in the Army of Northern Virginia are evaluated for character development. While Hill had proved himself a fearless division commander in the Army of Northern Virginia he nevertheless developed a reputation as an uncompromising, carping and sarcastic subordinate. When Hill arrived at Chattanooga in July 1863, relations between him and Braxton Bragg quickly began to sour. Hill's failure to act promptly at McLemore's Cove was a result of his distrust in Confederate cavalry and Bragg's situational awareness. After the first day of the Battle of Chickamauga, Bragg decided to change his command structure by creating two Confederate Wing Commanders. James Longstreet would command the Left Wing and Leonidas Polk commanded the Right Wing. Bragg's plan was for Hill's Corps to initiate the Confederate attack at daylight on 20 September. Hill was not informed of the attack until well after daylight. The delay allowed Rosecrans' Army to use precious daylight to fortify its positions. After the battle, Bragg relieved Hill of command. Though Hill's performance at Chickamauga was lackluster it did not warrant his removal.

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## INTRODUCTION

The American Civil War was arguably the single most defining point in this nation's history. It began on 12 April 1861, when Confederates opened fire on Fort Sumter in Charleston Harbor, South Carolina. It lasted until 26 May 1865, when the last Confederate army surrendered. In a bloody and bitter struggle the Union army eventually defeated the Confederate army, but the cost was horrific. The war took more than 600,000 lives, destroyed \$5 billion of property, freed four million slaves, and opened wounds that have not yet completely healed more than 125 years later.<sup>1</sup>

The primary cause of the war was slavery. The eleven Southern states that formed the Confederacy depended on slavery to support their economy. Slave labor produced crops, namely cotton. Although slavery was illegal in the Northern states, only a small number of Northerners actively opposed it. The main debate between the North and the South prior to the war was whether slavery should be permitted in the Western territories recently acquired during the Mexican War. Opponents of slavery were concerned about its expansion, in part because they did not want to compete against slave labor.

In the early days of the United States, loyalty to one's state was common place, often taking precedence over loyalty to one's country. A New Yorker or a Virginian would refer to his state as "my country." Becoming a member of the Union was voluntary by sovereign states as long as it served their purpose. In the early years of the nation, no state had any strong sense of the permanence of the Union. For example, New England once thought of seceding from the Union because the War of 1812 diminished trade with England.<sup>2</sup>

Although most historical accounts of the Civil War center on the Eastern theater, the struggle in the West had a great impact on the outcome of the war. In June 1863, this region was so important to the Confederacy that two divisions of the Army of Northern Virginia were sent to fight in the Battle of Chickamauga. The liberation of middle and east Tennessee increased Union morale and cost the Confederate army thousands of square miles of industrial and agricultural productivity. Chattanooga, a major Southern railroad hub, was the key objective of this region.<sup>3</sup>

This thesis will examine the performance of Confederate General Daniel Harvey Hill at the Battle of Chickamauga. Specifically, it will analyze Hill's personality and leadership abilities. Hill established a reputation in the Army of Northern Virginia during the first two years of the war as the best division commander in the army. However, his critical nature became a liability to the overall morale of the army. Continually at odds with Robert E. Lee, the commander of the Army of Northern Virginia, Hill was relegated to command the defenses of Richmond and Department North Carolina in January 1863. His exile was short-lived when Confederate President Jefferson Davis gave Hill a second chance in the Western Theater.

Chapter 1 will develop Hill's background before the Chattanooga Campaign. He was a West Point graduate who returned a hero from the Mexican War. After the Mexican War he got married, resigned his commission in the army, and became an educator. Hill spent these years preparing for what he considered the inevitable, civil war. When the Civil War began, Hill quickly volunteered to serve in the Confederacy and was appointed a colonel in the North Carolina militia. Again, he became an instant hero after the Battle of Big Bethel, the first land battle of the war. He was shortly



thereafter promoted to major general and appointed a division commander. While his exploits of personal bravery as division commander were numerous, his critical and carping nature was considered a detractor. During his stint with the Army of Northern Virginia, he is probably most famous for his gallant stand at South Mountain, Maryland, September 1862. That nearly disastrous fight would scar his judgment a year later at McLemore's Cove during the Chattanooga Campaign.

Chapter 2 will introduce Hill to the Western Theater and the Army of Tennessee. Confederate President Jefferson Davis decided to promote Hill to lieutenant general and place him in charge of an entire corps. Hill's new commander, Braxton Bragg, was a comrade of his from the Mexican War. Hill was excited about his opportunity to prove himself at the next level of responsibility, but his relationship with Bragg soon began to sour. The chapter culminates with the failed operation at McLemore's Cove. As the Confederate army began to withdraw from Chattanooga, the pursuing Union army became overextended, presenting an opportunity for Bragg to defeat it in detail. Bragg's plan called for a division of Hill's Corps to join forces with another division and attack a lone Union division in a valley. Hill was slow to act because he was reluctant to trust Bragg's assessment of the situation. Instead, he relied on his own judgement. His failure to seize this opportunity was the first in a series of complaints that Bragg would launch towards Hill after the Battle of Chickamauga.

Chapter 3 will analyze Hill's actions and judgement from 11 September to 19 September. It will continue to develop Hill's relationship with Bragg and with his fellow general officers. Bragg's indecisiveness in the face of the enemy further agitated Hill, thereby straining the already tenuous relationship between the two. Early on the

nineteenth, Hill saw an opportunity to exploit gaps in the line on the Union's southern flank. Bragg stubbornly held to his original plan of attacking the northern flank of the Union. The chapter concludes with Hill leading one of his divisions in a fruitless night fight. Though he did not order the ill-conceived fight, he actively participated. By this time, Hill was frustrated with his duties as a corps commander. During this fight, he reverted back to his forte, leading troops in close combat. In doing so, he temporarily neglected his duties at a critical time during the first day of the two-day Battle of Chickamauga. For while Hill was involved in a division fight, Bragg was formulating plans for the next day that hinged on a daylight attack from Hill's Corps.

Chapter 4 will focus on the confusing night of 19 September and the final day of the Battle of Chickamauga. On the evening of 19 September, Bragg decided to change the command structure of his army, dividing it into two wings. Lieutenant General James Longstreet had just arrived with his corps from Virginia to bolster Bragg's numbers. Both Longstreet and Bragg's senior organic corps commander, Lieutenant General Leonidas Polk, outranked Hill. Bragg put Longstreet in charge of the Right Wing and Polk the Left Wing. Hill was placed under Polk's command. Bragg's plan called for Hill's Corps to initiate the attack. The responsibility to inform Hill of the daylight attack and of the change in command structure was bestowed upon Polk since he commanded the Right Wing. Through a comedy of errors, Hill did not receive the order to attack at daylight. As a result, the attack did not commence until nearly four hours after sunrise. The remainder of the chapter analyzes Hill's actions on the battlefield. While Polk was the wing commander, Hill ran the tactical part of the battle. Hill became fixated on a gap that developed between his two divisions. His obsession with this gap caused undue

delays and resulted in a piecemeal application of the Right Wing's Reserve Corps. In spite of the difficulties and miscues, the Right Wing eventually launched a coordinated attack and succeeded in defeating its Union adversaries.

Chapter 5 will examine the aftermath of the battle. Bragg was severely criticized for not pursuing the routed Federal army and allowing its occupation of Chattanooga. In essence, Bragg had won the battle, but lost the campaign. As his corps commanders began plotting to remove him, Bragg began a purge campaign of his own to rid himself of those officers he deemed incompetent or disloyal. In Bragg's judgement, Hill fit both categories. Jefferson Davis was quick to agree with Bragg's assessment. Despite Hill's outward criticism towards him, Davis had promoted Hill to lieutenant general. Hill's lack of appreciation towards Davis for his controversial promotion was a contributing factor to his being relieved of command. The chapter concludes with a synopsis of modern day lessons that can be learned from Daniel Harvey Hill's strengths and weaknesses.

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<sup>1</sup>Civil War, American. *Encarta Encyclopedia*. Internet. Available from <http://www.encarta.msn.com/find/concise/asp?ti=761567354&sid=1#s1>; accessed 6 April 2001.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>Steven Woodworth, *Six Armies in Tennessee* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1998), xiii, xiv.

## CHAPTER 1

### BACKGROUND

#### The Early Years

Born in the York district of South Carolina on July 12, 1821, the youngest of eleven children, Daniel Harvey Hill did not have many fond memories of his childhood. His father died when he was four, leaving his mother with significant debts. In later years he remarked that he never had a normal youth. He described his mother as loving but that she also had extreme mood swings. She treated him with alternate harshness and tenderness that corresponded to her fluctuating moods. Of his childhood he remarked, "I had always a strong perception of right and wrong, and when corrected from petulance or passion, I brooded over it, and I am afraid did not forget it."<sup>1</sup> He blamed many of his darker personality traits on his mother.

Hill grew up with a proud tradition of service to country. As a young boy he listened to stories about his grandfathers and other Southern men who had fought valiantly in the Revolutionary War. His paternal grandfather, William Hill, served with distinction as a colonel under the famous Thomas Sumter. After the war he served in the South Carolina Senate for twenty years and was an elder in the Presbyterian Church. His mother's father, Thomas Cabeen, earned a reputation for extraordinary bravery as a scout for Sumter. Though he had a great heritage of male role models in his family, Hill's son suggested that the biggest male influence in his life was his father-in-law, Dr. R. H. Morrison, founder of Davidson College and eminent minister of the Presbyterian Church. Hill had great affection and admiration for the "stern old Calvinist."<sup>2</sup>

Since his mother was in debt as Hill passed through his childhood, his only option for college was the U. S. Military Academy at West Point, New York. In 1838, he was accepted to West Point. Hill's four years at West Point were difficult. Weakened by a spinal condition, he was frequently ill during his freshman, or "plebe" year. His health improved during the three final years and he graduated 28th out of a class of 56. Interestingly, he received some of his lowest marks in mathematics, the subject he would later teach at Washington College and Davidson College. He appeared to be generally liked by his peers at West Point. The class of 1842 produced 15 Civil War generals; some of the most notable included James Longstreet, William Rosecrans, Richard H. Anderson, Gustavus Smith and Lafayette McLaws.<sup>3</sup>

#### The Mexican War

Upon being commissioned a second lieutenant in the First Artillery, Hill served three years of mundane service up and down the East Coast from Fort Kent, Maine to Savannah, Georgia. In August 1845, he was reassigned to Corpus Christi, Texas. Rumors of war with Mexico were looming on the horizon. His company commander was First Lieutenant Braxton Bragg, under whom he would later serve at Chickamauga. During the Mexican War he received a brevet promotion to captain, and then major, for his bravery and courage at Contreras and Chapultepec. He met his future friend and brother-in-law, Thomas Jackson, in Mexico. Although he was commissioned as an artillery officer, his regiment mainly served as infantry during the Mexican War. His combat lessons in the use of entrenchment, concentration of force, massed artillery, daring attack and turning movements would be applied later during the Civil War.<sup>4</sup>

Early in his career it was evident that Hill saw no place for officers that were placed in positions of authority due to their political connections. Major General Gideon Pillow knew little of war, but much of politics. He had been President Polk's law partner, and held a commission in the Army. During the siege of Chapultepec, while on a reconnaissance, Hill received conflicting orders. One came from his brigade commander that ordered him to withdraw. At the same time, General Pillow, who had taken charge of the brigade, issued an order for Hill to hold his ground at all costs. Unaware of this, Hill obeyed the order of his brigade commander. General Pillow was furious when he learned Hill did not obey his order to hold his ground. He publicly censured Hill using words that Hill found very offensive. Hill drew his sword and shook it in the general's face forbidding him to use such language again. Pillow had him arrested, but Hill's brigade commander convinced Pillow to release him and eventually Pillow retracted the offensive language.<sup>5</sup> D. H. Hill walked a fine line between moral courage and outright insubordination. He would cross the line many times in his checkered military career.

Shortly after the fall of Chapultepec, about five thousand Mexican soldiers turned and ran down a narrow causeway, fleeing towards Mexico City. Hill quickly organized a handful of troops to defeat them before they reached the city walls. Far out in front of the main Army, Hill had no supporting artillery. Then suddenly, a group of lancers turned their horses and charged Hill's small group of men who stood their ground although badly outnumbered. Just as all seemed lost, Lieutenant Thomas J. Jackson made his way forward with two unsupported cannons and opened fire. Without any room to maneuver on the narrow causeway, the lancers were torn apart with

accurate and concentrated fire. The Mexicans turned and fled. Shortly thereafter Mexico surrendered.<sup>6</sup> Hill's reckless physical courage would become his trademark in combat. Joseph E. Johnston always maintained: "D. H. Hill was the bravest man in the army in Mexico."<sup>7</sup>

Throughout Hill's military career, he was apt to stir up controversial issues when not engaged in fighting a visible enemy. So it would be when he remained in Mexico for six months after the war. Bitter over the fact that volunteer officers without military training had risen to high rank during the war, and that undisciplined volunteer robbed and pillaged the Mexican people, Hill decided to make his protests public. In what would become his modus operandi in the lulls between fighting, he wrote three scathing articles for the Charleston Mercury bashing the lawless volunteers, the volunteer system and "mob-courting miscreants" like President Polk. Although this outward display of disgust towards the existing system put him at risk of court-martial, he went unscathed for writing the articles.<sup>8</sup>

#### The Educator

As was expected of Southern gentlemen, Hill married well. Once back in the United States, the young hero was granted leave to visit his family. While visiting his sister in Lincoln County, North Carolina, Hill met Isabella Morrison. Isabella was 23 years old, intelligent, educated, and a devout Presbyterian. Her father, Reverend Robert H. Morrison, was a prominent Presbyterian Reverend and noted religious leader. She was a perfect match for the young warrior of the Carolinas, a typical Southern Belle of that period with a politically connected family. Her uncle was the governor of North Carolina. They were soon engaged to be married. Hill had two best men at the

wedding, Larry and John Gibbon. Ironically, John would become a Union general and fight against Hill at South Mountain.<sup>9</sup>

Not willing to expose his new wife to the rigors of army camp life, Hill resigned his commission from the Army and began a career as an educator. In 1848, he took a job at Washington College in Lexington, Virginia, teaching mathematics. While in Lexington, he maintained close contact with his friend, Thomas Jackson. Hill wrote a strong letter of recommendation for Jackson when he applied for a teaching position at the nearby Virginia Military Institute. Jackson got the job. Hill was older than Jackson and took on the role of mentor, advising him about such topics as religion and love. It was Hill that helped guide him into the Presbyterian Church. They became brothers-in-law when Jackson married Isabella's sister after the death of his first wife.<sup>10</sup>

As an educator, Hill had a famous reputation as a strong disciplinarian and excellent teacher. In 1854, Hill accepted a position at Davidson College, North Carolina as a mathematics instructor. One of his students, J. W. Ratchford, who would later serve as his chief of staff, described Hill as a superb instructor, "He had the happy faculty of imparting information, and what I appreciated most as a student was his ability to draw out what a boy knew." C. D. Fishburne, another of his students at Davidson, described his teaching abilities as follows, "As a teacher I have never seen his superior, he had the rare capacity of interesting his pupils and of compelling them to use their faculties, often it seems unconsciously, in a manner that surprised themselves." His stern approach towards discipline was often the topic of conversation among his students and faculty. Although a stern disciplinarian, his students seemed to believe he was always fair in rendering punishment. In a character study of D. H. Hill, Dr. Henry



Sheppard stated that "No one understood more thoroughly the theory or doctrine of putting yourself in the other man's place." Sheppard described a situation where he and another student were eating dinner at the Davidson dining hall and a nineteenth century food fight ensued. Both young men were brought in front of the faculty. Hill said to Sheppard, "A member of the Church ought not to be engaged in an affair like this." At which point, Sheppard gave his account of the story, saying he was provoked beyond his means and lost his self-control. Hill replied with his characteristic frankness, "Well, I think it highly probable that in the same circumstance, I should have done the same myself."<sup>11</sup>

He grew up with unbending conviction that within the larger nation Southern manhood was bravest and Southern civilization the best. Unlike many other Confederate Generals that would initially object to secession when it became the hotbed of discussion, Hill had a deep-seated belief that Southern society was superior to anything in the land. In a speech to the Davidson College Board of Trustees in 1855, Hill exclaimed:

And what shall I say of the noble state in which I was born? I have loved her with a love stronger than that of a woman. . . .I pride myself upon nothing so much as having never permitted to pass, unrebuked, a slighting remark, upon the glorious state that gave me being.<sup>12</sup>

While Hill loved his home state of South Carolina; he had an equal disdain for Yankees, particularly those from New England, where most abolitionists resided. In an algebra textbook he authored in 1857, he poked fun at Northerners:

A Yankee mixes a certain number of wooden nutmegs, which cost him  $\frac{1}{4}$  cent apiece, with a quantity of real nutmegs, worth 4 cents apiece, and sells the whole assortment for \$44; and gains \$3.75 by the fraud. How many wooden nutmegs were there?<sup>13</sup>

Fiercely loyal to South Carolina and the Southern way of life, Hill was a staunch supporter of fellow statesman and family acquaintance, John C. Calhoun. Calhoun was the radical father of secession, even though he died in 1850. Calhoun advanced the proposition that each individual state retained the power to nullify any Federal law it deemed unconstitutional. Hill's commitment to preserve the Southern way of life was formidable, despite Federal laws. In the early 1850s, Hill believed the nation was becoming divided, making civil war inevitable. This belief was the driving force for his enthusiastic support for a movement in the South to begin establishing more military academies. Southern secessionists knew they needed to train their own future leaders, and that West Point itself could not produce the volume needed. To that end, Hill accepted a job as superintendent of the North Carolina Military Institute in 1858. He wanted to take an active role in preparing Southern youth for the impending war. This movement to create more "West Points" in the South was a major precursor to the Civil War.

#### Early Civil War Exploits

Hill did not share the same optimism as many Southerners about the chances of a quick victory. When news of John Brown's raid at Harper's Ferry reached Charlotte, he prepared a stirring speech for the cadets. His painfully prophetic words told them what to expect in the weeks and years ahead. "He warned us that it would be no child's play, and the chances were that it would last as long as the Revolutionary War, and that we would all get enough of it. He mentioned the contrast between the resources of the North and South, both in men and means."<sup>14</sup> Hill resigned his post as superintendent ten days after the fall of Fort Sumter and was appointed a colonel of the volunteers by

North Carolina Governor Ellis. Placed in charge of a volunteer training camp near Raleigh, North Carolina, Hill began training volunteer recruits for combat duty. A month later, in May 1861, he was elected to lead the First Regiment of the North Carolina Volunteers, a combat infantry unit.

He soon saw combat at Big Bethel, the first land battle of the war. Colonel John Magruder, also a Mexican War veteran, was the Confederate force commander with Hill as second in command. Outnumbered three to one, the Confederate forces prevailed. Hill and Magruder became instant heroes throughout the South. The governor of North Carolina promptly recommended Hill for promotion to Brigadier General. In a report to Magruder, Major Randolph summed up Hill's part in the victory. "I am happy at having an opportunity to render my acknowledgements to Colonel Hill, for the useful suggestions which his experience as an artillery officer enabled him to make to me during this engagement, and to bear testimony to the gallantry and discipline of that portion of his command with which I was associated. The untiring industry of his regiment in entrenching our position enabled us to defeat the enemy with a nominal loss to our side."<sup>15</sup> During the four-hour engagement only one Confederate was killed and ten wounded. In contrast, eighteen Union soldiers were killed and seventy-eight wounded. According to a Richmond newspaper, Big Bethel was one of the most extraordinary victories in the annals of war.<sup>16</sup>

In November, Hill assumed command of the North Carolina Brigade in Joseph E. Johnston's Department of Northern Virginia. His regiments were posted along the Potomac River at Leesburg. In this somewhat idle position, Hill reverted to his characteristic critical nature. The first prominent officer of the Civil War to feel his

wrath was cavalry commander J. E. B. Stuart, whose cavalry brigade was operating in the vicinity of Leesburg. When the cavalry was poorly handled during an engagement at Dranesville, Hill could not help from giving Stuart advice:

From what I have been able to learn, the enemy knew your strength and destination before you started. . . . I would therefore respectfully suggest that when you start again, you should disguise your strength and give out a different locality from that actually taken.<sup>17</sup>

This rebuke marked the beginning of a mutual dislike between the two generals that would exacerbate Confederate problems at South Mountain in 1862. To make his dislike of Stuart known further, Hill sent a letter to Confederate President Davis regarding, "the want of vigilance and intelligent observations on the part of General J. E. B. Stuart."<sup>18</sup>

Hill had a deep-seated distrust for cavalry leaders from the first year of the war. He is traditionally supposed to have been the officer that said that he had never seen a dead cavalryman on the battlefield. So blatant was his dislike for cavalrymen, especially their leaders, that he told his infantry troops in a public address:

The cavalry constitute the eyes and ears of the army. The safety of the entire command depends upon their vigilance and the faithfulness of their reports. The officers and men who permit themselves to be surprised deserve to die, and the commanding general will spare no effort to secure them their deserts. Almost equally criminal are the scouts who through fright bring in wild and sensational reports. They will be court-martialed for cowardice.<sup>19</sup>

Hill expected everyone to exhibit the same personal courage he did on the battlefield. He was unbending in his beliefs. This public denouncement could have done little to inspire and instill esprit de corps throughout an army. His open dislike of the cavalry is a sterling example of how he viewed everyone else's shortcomings as a personal battle. It seemed that his mission in life was a crusade against the morally weak who failed to

meet his standards. To say the least, his personality did not foster cooperation outside of his own command.

In March 1862, Hill was promoted to Major General and given command of the Fourth Division of the Army of Northern Virginia under General Joseph Johnston. His next major battle was Seven Pines, where he fought under future First Corps commander, James Longstreet. Hill's division spearheaded the assault. It was a poorly coordinated Confederate effort at the army level. Hill ended up commanding and directing 13 brigades on the Confederate right and received very little guidance from Longstreet. To Hill's credit, he fought brilliantly and received laudatory remarks from Thomas Carter, a man who fought in every major battle during the Civil War. In Carter's report of the battle he said the one good result that came from the engagement was improved morale in the Confederate ranks. To Hill, he declared "I consider the charge and capture of the works at Seven Pines by your command. . . the most difficult and dangerous that I saw during the war, except for Pickett's Division at Gettysburg."<sup>20</sup> Two of his brigades attacked from the front in a brilliantly coordinated attack supported by two artillery batteries. A third brigade attacked an exposed flank. With an average of four brigades in action, Hill drove three Union brigades from the breastworks, then three others from an entrenchment. Hill displayed physical courage and tenacity during the battle and demanded his troops press forward towards victory.

At one point in the battle, Hill became angry with the lack of aggressiveness displayed and sounded the rally cry, "Colonel Scales, come and occupy the position that these cowardly Virginians have fled from!"<sup>21</sup> He was pointing at William Mahone's Ninth Virginia that lay in a ditch nearby. Mahone caught up with Hill and protested

“You should not abuse my men, for I ordered them out of the fight.” Hill explained to Mahone that it caused a gap in the Confederate line that the enemy could pass through and break their line in two. He added salt to the wound by exclaiming, “I beg the soldier’s pardon for what I have said to them and transpose it all to you.”<sup>22</sup> As one could expect, Hill’s comment left yet another negative lasting impression on a fellow officer. Mahone challenged Hill to a duel after the battle. Although the duel never transpired, Mahone became a bitter enemy of Hill.

Not only did Hill alienate himself from officers of equal and lower rank, he was also quick to point out shortcomings in his superiors as well. He felt slighted when Longstreet got most of the credit for the victory while it was Hill’s combat leadership that had made the difference. Hill contended that Longstreet took credit for the battle, but that he never actually commanded the troops. His resentment over this issue lingered long after the war. He later wrote, “Longstreet very early got control of his superior officers and worked things to please himself. Thus at Seven Pines, he disregarded Johnston’s order to attack on Nine Mile Road and put my division first, came behind me, was not on the field at all and got all the credit of the battle.”<sup>23</sup> Though Hill was making enemies on both sides of the battlefield, his ability to lead a division was astounding. Noted historian Douglas S. Freeman summed up his accomplishments at Seven Pines, “He acted if the command of a division was an art he had mastered so long previously that he negligently could have disdained half he knew and still could have won.”<sup>24</sup> While Hill’s fighting prowess was unmatched, his inability to get along with peers and superiors was beginning to show itself. Yet despite his personal flaws, Hill’s stock as a fighting general was rapidly rising in the Confederacy.

After Seven Pines, Union Commander George McClellan began siege tactics around Richmond. In Hill's words, McClellan began "approaching Richmond with spade and shovel." Lee directed his army to do the same and won his famous nickname as the "king of spades." Lee was developing a grand plan to secretly pull Jackson's Division from the Valley and strike McClellan wherever he was vulnerable. With the Union Army within five miles of Richmond, Lee boldly decided to exercise economy of force to his front and concentrate the bulk of his army against the extreme right of the Union. His primary division commanders for the flank move were Longstreet, A. P. Hill, Stuart and D. H. Hill. Since Jackson had the farthest to march, Lee left the time and date of the attack to him. With the Union Army spread out on both sides of the Chickahominy River, Lee wanted to gain control of several key bridges, conduct a link-up, and sweep down the northern edge of the river. The whole plan hinged on Jackson's flank move at Beaverdam Creek. No reconnaissance was conducted of Beaverdam Creek, which would have alerted Confederate forces that the Union position on Beaverdam Creek was very defensible. The attack became fragmented with many small battles being fought. The battle culminated when Longstreet, A. P. Hill, and D. H. Hill finally concentrated their forces and gained some momentum. The Union Army began a night retreat towards Malvern Hill. Lee wanted to press the attack. Hill protested that little was known about the terrain or enemy disposition. Hill was overruled and the attack was a disaster for Lee. Though Hill developed a great respect for his new commander, even Lee was not above his criticism. Hill publicly denounced Lee's decision to press the attack. Postwar, Hill said the attack on Malvern Hill "was

not war, it was murder.”<sup>25</sup> Though Hill and Lee had professional respect for each other, there was no warmth in the relationship.

Hill was reassigned as commander of the North Carolina district during July and August 1862. His primary duty was to keep McClellan busy near the James River so he would not be able to join forces with Pope, but McClellan successfully evacuated his position and joined Pope’s army. Lee was clearly agitated by this and blamed D. H. Hill. In a letter to Davis, Lee lamented that he did not think Hill was capable of an independent command, and that “left to himself, he seems embarrassed and awkward to act.”<sup>26</sup> Lee recommended to Confederate President Jefferson Davis that Hill be replaced. Davis concurred and Hill was sent back to his old division in the Army of Northern Virginia. He made the transfer just in time to accompany his old division north on the Maryland Campaign. It seemed that Lee understood Hill’s strengths well: an unrivaled fighter at the tactical level that needed a strong influence to stay focused.

Hill’s Division was rear guard for Lee’s Army during the march northward. Lee felt that McClellan, the Union commander, was advancing north at such a slow pace that he could split his force and capture Harper’s Ferry while enroute to Hagerstown. Hill was left at Boonsborough with instructions in his own words “to dispose of my troops so as to prevent the escape of the Yankees from Harper’s Ferry, then besieged, and also to guard the pass in the Blue Ridge near Boonsborough.”<sup>27</sup> His first priority then was to gather up escaping forces from Harper’s Ferry. He did not contemplate a defense of South Mountain since McClellan was east of the mountain range, moving slowly and monitored by Stuart’s cavalry. McClellan’s progress was slow enough that it seemed certain Harper’s Ferry would be captured before he could threaten Lee’s



divided army. Hill's division was oriented south, towards the escape route from Harper's Ferry. He had not so much as reconnoitered the gaps at South Mountain.

As fate would have it, the usually cautious McClellan became aggressive, pressing westward towards the foot of South Mountain. Several Union soldiers found a copy of Lee's battle plan and turned it over to the Union commander. Confident that he knew Lee's intentions, McClellan began his pursuit on the divided army. Stuart sent word to Hill that three of his cavalry brigades had been driven back to the foot of South Mountain. He also informed Hill that he was sending his cavalry toward Harper's Ferry, but that Hill's men should not have too much difficulty holding the gap since he estimated only a cavalry brigade and one or two brigades of infantry were approaching. Hill was faced with a dilemma. His primary mission was to prevent forces from escaping north from Harper's Ferry. If he moved to defend the mountain passes, he was risking the capture of the army's wagon train. After some agonizing thought, Hill decided on a compromise, dispatching a brigade to Turner's Gap. Turner's Gap was the most likely route across the mountain. He dispatched a second brigade half way up the mountain within supporting distance and readied his remaining three brigades for movement. Not sure whether the threat was credible, he maintained a flexible posture to react to either contingency. Not comfortable making decisions on sketchy information, Hill felt isolated and alone. After the war he recalled never having felt a greater loneliness.<sup>28</sup>

The next morning, 14 September 1862, the Army of the Potomac began advancing on Hill's position at Turner's Gap. Quickly, Hill ordered two more brigades to Turner's Gap. Hill and Stuart were both under the impression that Harper's Ferry

had already been captured and that an all-out defense of the mountain was not required. Lee saw the gravity of the situation. Knowing that Harper's Ferry was not yet secured, Lee ordered Longstreet to reinforce Hill. Hill, with his meager division, succeeded in holding off the Union assaults until Longstreet's division arrived. In a hard fought defense, they held the attackers off until dark. That evening Hill and Longstreet met with Lee to discuss their options. Hill was of the opinion that Turner's Gap could not be held another day and Longstreet concurred. Hill stealthily brought his division off the mountain under the cover of darkness and headed towards the link-up village of Sharpsburg.

Though he felt alone and isolated before Longstreet arrived at South Mountain, Hill reverted to his confident, close combat mentality when Longstreet finally arrived. Then, in what was becoming his usual post-battle analysis, Hill ridiculed the on-scene commander's piece-mealing of forces, and poor troop placement.<sup>29</sup> A pattern of behavior was developing that would haunt Hill's performance as a corps commander a year later. At the strategic level, Hill was unable to act boldly without explicit orders. Yet, once superiors took action, he would attack their decisions with vigor, arguing that he could have done it better.

It took two days for Lee to consolidate his army at Sharpsburg. The seizure of Harper's Ferry took longer than expected. Hill was extremely critical of Lee's actions at Sharpsburg. He wrote:

The Battle of Sharpsburg was a success as far as the failure of the Yankees to carry the position they assailed. It would, however, have been a glorious victory for us but for three causes:

First: The separation of our forces. Had McLaws and R. H. Anderson been earlier in the morning, the battle would not have lasted two hours, and would have been signally disastrous to the Yankees.

Second: The poor handling of artillery.

Third: The enormous straggling.<sup>30</sup>

There is little doubt that Hill's public denouncement of Lee's abilities was a deciding factor in his being passed over for promotion to lieutenant general. His critical nature was beginning to wear thin on the entire officer corps. During the Maryland Campaign, an artilleryman wrote home saying, "People up here, are very generally beginning to call D. H. Hill a numbskull."<sup>31</sup> After the Maryland Campaign, Jackson and Longstreet were promoted to Lieutenant General. Hill took this as a slap in the face and continued to point blame towards Lee, Longstreet, and others. Hill also felt the censure of the media and was blamed for failing to hold South Mountain longer. He was also initially blamed for losing Special Order 191, which was found by a Union soldier in an area where his division had encamped. While historians have long debated whether Hill or his staff was to blame for the lost order, the truth will never be known.

Hill's last battle with the Army of Northern Virginia was at Fredericksburg. He played only a minor role. As the harsh winter set in, he announced his intentions to resign his commission in January 1864. His primary reason for resigning was poor health: he had a history of stomach and back pain that seemed to get worse during the war. However, Jefferson Davis convinced him that his services were still needed and offered him command of the Department of North Carolina and Southern Virginia.

Hill accepted the offer. There Hill's primary focus was centered upon operations against New Bern and Washington, North Carolina. Hill's troops attacked twice, failing both times. Friction between him and Lee was renewed when Lee

requested reinforcements from Hill's department, but Hill refused to support him. A compromise was finally reached, but this final dispute probably sealed his banishment from the Army of Northern Virginia. Normally not one to make disparaging remarks of his fellow officers, Lee remarked, "D. H. Hill had such a queer temperament you could never tell what to expect from him."<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Hal Bridges, *Lee's Maverick General: Daniel Harvey Hill* (New York, NY: McGraw-Hill, 1961), 16-17. (Hereafter cited as *Lee's Maverick General*)

<sup>2</sup>Joseph M. Hill, *Daniel Harvey Hill* (Little Rock, AR: Arkansas Historical Commission, 1946), 9.

<sup>3</sup>See Hill, *Daniel Harvey Hill*, 7, 8; and Bridges, *Lee's Maverick General*, 18.

<sup>4</sup>A. C. Avery, "Life and Character of Lt. General D. H. Hill," *Southern Historical Society*, vol. 21, (1893), 114.

<sup>5</sup>Bridges, *Lee's Maverick General*, 21.

<sup>6</sup>*Ibid.*, 21-22.

<sup>7</sup>Hill, *Daniel Harvey Hill*, 8.

<sup>8</sup>Bridges, *Lee's Maverick General*, 22.

<sup>9</sup>See Hill, *Daniel Harvey Hill*, 10; and Bridges, *Lee's Maverick General*, 23.

<sup>10</sup>Bridges, *Lee's Maverick General*, 25.

<sup>11</sup>Henry Sheppard, "General D. H. Hill: A Character Study," *Confederate Veteran*, vol. 8, (August, 1917), 366.

<sup>12</sup>D. H. Hill, "College Discipline," *An Inaugural Address Delivered at Davidson College, N.C., On 28 February 1855* (The Watchman Office, 1855), 4.

<sup>13</sup>Major D. H. Hill, *Elements of Hill's Algebra* (Philadelphia, PA: J. B. Lippincott and Company, 1857), 124.

<sup>14</sup>J. W. Ratchford to D. H. Hill, Jr., Paint Rock, Texas, n.d., p. 4, Daniel Harvey Hill, Jr. Papers, North Carolina Division of Archives and History, Raleigh, N.C.

<sup>15</sup>Bridges, *Lee's Maverick General*, 29.

<sup>16</sup>Douglas Southall Freeman, *Lee's Lieutenants*, 3 volumes (New York, NY: Scribner's Sons, 1942), vol. 1, 18.

<sup>17</sup>Jeffery Wert, "I am so Unlike Other Folks" *Civil War Times Illustrated*, 1989, 16.

<sup>18</sup>United States War Department, *The War of the Rebellion: A compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*, 70 volumes (Washington, DC: Government Publishing Company, 1880-1891) series 1, vol. 5, 1063. (Hereafter cited as *O.R.*, all subsequent references are to series 1).

<sup>19</sup>*Ibid.*, vol. 18, 895.

<sup>20</sup>Bridges, *Lee's Maverick General*, 54.

<sup>21</sup>Walter Clark, *History of Several Regiments and Battalions from North Carolina in the Great War, 1861-1864*, 5 volumes (Raleigh, NC: E. M. Uzell, 1901), vol. 1, 693.

<sup>22</sup>Bridges, *Lee's Maverick General*, 50.

<sup>23</sup>*Ibid.*, 55.

<sup>24</sup>Freeman, *Lee's Lieutenants*, vol. 1, 247.

<sup>25</sup>Wert, 18.

<sup>26</sup>*O.R.*, vol. 51, part 2, 1075.

<sup>27</sup>*O.R.*, vol. 19, part 1, 1019; Freeman, *Lee's Lieutenants*, vol. 2, 167.

<sup>28</sup>Bridges, *Lee's Maverick General*, 101; Freeman, *Lee's Lieutenants*, 173-180.

<sup>29</sup>*O.R.*, vol. 19, part 1, 1021.

<sup>30</sup>*Ibid.*, 1022, 1025, 1026.

<sup>31</sup>Wert, 19.

<sup>32</sup>*Ibid.*

## CHAPTER 2

### CHATTANOOGA CAMPAIGN

#### Hill's Second Chance

By the latter part of June 1863, things were looking grim for the Confederacy. Federal armies were exerting pressure on three fronts. In the west, General Ulysses S. Grant was perfecting his siege tactics and tightening his hold on Vicksburg, Mississippi. General Hooker's Army of the Potomac was mirroring General Robert E. Lee's excursion into Union territory in southern Pennsylvania. General Rosecrans' Army of the Cumberland marched toward Braxton Bragg's Army of Tennessee on 24 June, adding to the already tenuous Confederate situation.

While Lee had the initiative in the East, Confederate President Davis carefully supported his movements north by using economy of force in the western theater. Vicksburg was sure to fall soon, as Grant's siege tactics were beginning to wear down the Confederate defenders. Rosecrans' southward movement put an additional strain on the Confederacy's limited resources and relatively small number of troops available. Then, in the first week of July, Lee was soundly defeated at Gettysburg; Vicksburg was surrendered; and Bragg retreated across the Tennessee River to Chattanooga. The Union army gained control of the entire Mississippi River, splitting the Confederacy; the Army of Northern Virginia backtracked to Virginia; and Union forces controlled central Tennessee.<sup>1</sup> It was a decisive moment for Bragg, for although he had given up control of an essential portion of Confederate held territory, he commanded the most unscathed army in the Confederacy. President Davis desperately needed a quick victory or all

hopes of independence would be lost. Bragg's Army of Tennessee was the only hope to get the Confederacy back on track.

Still in charge of the Department of North Carolina and the defenses around Richmond and Petersburg, Hill was about to get his second chance in the annals of history. He had paid his penance in the Confederate backwaters, and it was time that he was sent west to join other Confederate misfits in the Army of Tennessee. Although he had significant disputes with Lee and Davis, the Confederate president still considered him a valuable asset. About 10 July, Davis visited Hill's camp in Richmond, congratulated him on his defense of the city, announced he was promoted to Lieutenant General, and ordered him to report to General Joseph E. Johnston in Mississippi. Davis reconsidered shortly thereafter, instead sending Lieutenant General Hardee to Mississippi. Thus, on 13 July, Davis sent a telegram to Hill redirecting him to Chattanooga, to command Hardee's Corps.<sup>2</sup>

An intimate friend of Mr. Davis criticized him for taking a chance on Hill because of his insubordinate nature and the rumblings that Hill had lost General Order 191, thus compromising Lee's plans in the Maryland campaign. In response to this, Davis answered, "It is not proven that he was to blame in reference of the lost order. Besides, men are not perfect, and I can give no personal resentment to true, brave men who are such fighters as all know Hill to be, no matter what their feelings may be to me individually."<sup>3</sup> Notorious for giving fellow countrymen the benefit of the doubt, the trusting President put his personal feelings aside and chose Hill for his reputation as a fearless fighter. This was the beginning of a long and bitter struggle between Hill,

Bragg, and Davis. By October, Davis and Bragg would agree to use Hill as the scapegoat for the failures at Chickamauga.

Hill began moving towards Chattanooga on the fourteenth, although the poor railroad system forced him and his staff to leave their horses in Virginia and pick up fresh ones in Atlanta. He reported to Bragg on 19 July and assumed command of Hardee's old corps.<sup>4</sup> His general staff was a hybrid of officers left over from Hardee's staff and those he brought with him from Richmond, would be the second smallest of regularly constituted corps staffs on the battlefield of Chickamauga. Only Longstreet's staff would be smaller.<sup>5</sup>

Lieutenant Colonel Archer Anderson	Assistant Adjutant General
Major J. W. Ratchford	Assistant Adjutant General
Major J. L. Cross	Assistant Adjutant General
Major A. C. Avery	Assistant Inspector General
Major W. C. Duxbury	Chief of Ordnance
Major I. Scherck	Chief Commissary
Captain T. Coleman	Chief Engineer
Captain E. H. Ewing	Acting Chief Quartermaster
Captain Bradford	Pay Master
Surgeon A. R. Erskine	Chief Surgeon
Assistant Surgeon J. F. Young	Medical Purveyor
Lieutenant George C. Bain	Signal Officer
Lieutenant Colonel J.W. Bondurant	Chief of Artillery
Lieutenant James A. Reid	aide-de-camp
Lieutenant Reid Morrison	aide-de-camp
Mr. George West	Volunteer Aide de Camp <sup>6</sup>

Accompanying Hill from Richmond were Major Ratchford, Lieutenant Reid, Lieutenant Morrison, and Lieutenant Colonel Bondurant. Hill's principal staff officers were J. W. Ratchford and Archer Anderson. Ratchford had a war record of honorable and efficient service.<sup>7</sup> Hill and Ratchford had known each other since 1858, when Ratchford was a student of Hill's at Davidson College. The two enjoyed a sort of father-son relationship,



having served together since Big Bethel. Ratchford joined Hill on many reconnaissance missions, and was amazed by his physical courage on the battlefield. Archer Anderson eventually replaced Ratchford as Hill's chief of staff and was also a loyal follower of Hill.<sup>8</sup>

It was logical that Hill would be excited about the prospect of commanding a corps. Other than his desire to prove himself, he believed the Confederate focus should be shifted west. He appreciated the importance of Chattanooga and its strategic connection to east Tennessee. Additionally, since the Union defeat at Chancellorsville in May, Hill believed the Army of the Potomac would not make offensive movements for many months. Before the fall of Vicksburg, he had strongly advocated that a corps from Lee's army be sent to help Johnston preserve the beleaguered city that he referred to as "the heart of the Confederacy." Although it was too late to defend Vicksburg, Hill was excited about his new promotion and the opportunity to defend Chattanooga.<sup>9</sup>

Hill had a realistic perspective towards the Confederate cause. The lack of active support from France or England dampened his enthusiasm. In a letter to North Carolina Governor Vance, he thanked him for his support while commanding the Department of North Carolina and expressed hopes that, "When France and England think our cause almost gone, they will interfere. They will never consent to a reestablishment of the old Union. I notice that even the Yankees themselves take that view . . . spite of all their glorification over Vicksburg."<sup>10</sup>

Hill also knew that the South needed more soldiers and was emphatic about making his views known. From Chattanooga, he wrote a letter to Confederate Adjutant General Cooper:

I would most respectfully call the attention of the President to the vast number of able-bodied young men out of the service. From Richmond VA to this point, there is not a city, town or village which has not any more in it than before the War. At every spot, there were crowds of young men. The abolition of the exemption bill would give us 400,000 able-bodied young men; its modification so as not to interfere with the industrial pursuits of the country would give us at least 200,000. As the enemy advances, and occupies our territory, many soldiers desert in order to protect their families. Thus our strength is being daily weakened, and, unless something is done speedily to reinforce the army, the contest will become very unequal. I hope that the great importance of the subject will justify this informal communication. I thought it most likely that as the President had not been traveling lately, he was not aware of the vast number of drones and laggards in the country.<sup>11</sup>

While many fellow officers shared his perspective of the Southern manpower shortage, few were as outspoken about a solution. He took a realistic approach to the level of effort required for victory. Continuing to pursue the exemption issue, he drafted a more thorough petition on the subject:

We the undersigned officers of the Confederate Army being deeply impressed with the belief that unless the ranks are speedily replenished, our cause will be lost. . . would implore the president. . . to take prompt measures to recruit our wasted armies by fresh levies from home.<sup>12</sup>

Hill knew the existing system would not produce enough manpower to repel the industrial North.

In this letter, he admonished Davis to “call upon the respective states for enlarged quotas of troops” or convince Congress to modify the existing exemption law. He then assailed the exemption abuses one by one: disproportionate numbers flocking to exempt occupations; the 150,000 soldiers who employed substitutes, “not one in a hundred” of whom had remained in the service; and the “timid and effeminate young men” who used political influence to receive placement in safe military jobs. Hill and seventeen other Confederate officers, including Bragg, signed the petition.<sup>13</sup>

About two weeks later General Cooper responded to the petition, questioning the accuracy of Hill's math and bluntly stating that even if the Confederacy could muster more soldiers, there were not enough rifles to outfit them for combat. In essence, the South was deficient in war material as well as manpower. Both areas needed to expand to achieve a decisive effect. Hill also mentioned the dichotomy of the Southern cause; there was a need for a strong central government when the basic issue of the war was states' rights.<sup>14</sup>

In the end, Hill's effort to restructure the Confederate conscription system only added to his reputation as a contentious subordinate. The time and energy he wasted gathering signatures and drafting letters would have been better spent on problems he had control over. Just weeks before, Davis had graciously given him a second opportunity to lead troops in combat. Hill's disregard for Davis' kindness would diminish the loyalty he had towards him. When forced to make difficult personnel decisions after the Battle of Chickamauga, Davis would choose his friends and loyal followers over Hill.

### The Reunion

Though both Hill and Bragg had fought in the war from the beginning, Hill had probably not seen Bragg since he was a junior lieutenant in Captain Bragg's artillery battery during the Mexican War in 1845. Ironically, the other two lieutenants in the battery were John F. Reynolds and George H. Thomas. The four young officers shared the same mess, as was customary. Reynolds, a Union corps commander in the Army of the Potomac, was killed at Gettysburg. As fate would have it, Thomas was a corps commander under Rosecrans, soon to be opposing Hill and Bragg in the Battle of

Chickamauga. Hill referred to Thomas as the strongest, most pronounced Southerner of the four. Surely he harbored some ill feelings toward Thomas because he chose to fight for the Union. Of this strange situation, Hill remarked, "It is a strange casting of lots that three messmates of Corpus Christi should meet under such changed circumstances at Chickamauga."<sup>15</sup>

This initial meeting between the former comrades dampened Hill's upbeat attitude about his assignment to the Army of Tennessee:

My interview with General Bragg at Chattanooga was not satisfactory. He was silent and reserved and seemed gloomy and despondent. He had grown prematurely old since I saw him last, and showed much nervousness. His relations with next in command (General Polk) and with some others of his subordinates were known not to be pleasant. His many retreats, too, had alienated the rank and file from him, or at least had taken away that enthusiasm which soldiers feel for the successful general, and which makes them obey his orders without question, and thus wins for him other successes. The one thing that a soldier never fails to understand is victory and the commander who leads him to victory will be adored by him whether that victory has been won by skill or blundering, by the masterly handling of a few troops against great odds, or by the awkward use of overwhelming numbers.<sup>16</sup>

Though probably accurate, Hill's critical, unbending evaluation of his new boss failed to consider that Bragg had commanded the turbulent and pressure-packed army for more than a year, while Hill recuperated out of the spotlight for seven months. With Bragg at his worst and Hill quick tempered, single minded, and sensitive by nature, it was only a matter of time before both men's patience would wear thin.

Hill needed a direct and forceful commander to mentor him and keep his mouth in check. He needed a rock to lean on, someone who was unwavering in tense situations. The last thing he needed was a tired commander who himself was alienated from his command. He began to revert to his uncompromising self again. His chance to prove

himself on the next rung of leadership was in his grasp, and he was beginning to unravel. He would quickly join the anti-Bragg clique with Polk and others.

His harsh, sarcastic criticisms alienated Hill from many of his fellow officers.<sup>17</sup> Shortly after arriving at Chattanooga, Hill began his dark sarcasm which few understood. While approving a leave request for a soldier from Georgia, he added the following remark, "Approved because if soldiers are not allowed to go home occasionally, the next generation will be the offspring of skulkers and cowards."<sup>18</sup> In his unusual, humorous way, he was implying that the only men fathering children in the South would be those who avoided military service. However, W. H. T. Walker took offense to this remark, regarding it a slur against Georgian women. This miscommunication started a rift between Hill and Walker that continued throughout the campaign, culminating on the final day of the Battle of Chickamauga in a heated argument over the tactical employment of Walker's Reserve Corps.

### The Strategic Importance of Chattanooga

Chattanooga was a decisive point for the Confederacy. Central and east Tennessee was the fault line of the west. Surrounded by Southern secessionists, the mountain folk in this region were pro-Union. The Confederacy had to control this population in order to hold onto their ground in the Western Theater. Since Southern commanders spent most of the war operating amongst friendly civilian populations, this region of independent citizens would prove too difficult to hold. Thus, this isolated pocket of loyalists became a political objective for President Lincoln. By sending Rosecrans south to liberate them, Lincoln would gain a moral victory for the Union.

Logistically, Chattanooga was the center of an expansive railroad network. To the northeast, the Tennessee and Georgia Railroads connected Chattanooga to Lynchburg, Virginia, and Knoxville, Tennessee, an area of important pro-Union sentiment. To the northwest, the Nashville and Chattanooga Railroad was the primary line to central Tennessee which produced saltpeter, copper, and grain for the soldiers. Another important railroad linked Chattanooga to northern Alabama and Atlanta, both critical areas. Northern Alabama held valuable nitre mines. From Atlanta, Bragg's army received supplies from critical quartermaster, commissary, ordnance depots, munitions, and iron works in central Georgia.<sup>19</sup>

Steep mountains surrounding Chattanooga on three sides dominated the terrain. If troops were positioned correctly and proper defenses prepared, Chattanooga was a natural fortress. The Tennessee River was 2,700 feet wide a few miles downstream at Bridgeport, Alabama. Crossing a river of that magnitude is an engineering feat, even by today's standard. Walden's Ridge overlooked the city 1,300 feet above and ran parallel to the Tennessee River, in a northerly fashion. Raccoon and Sand Mountains paralleled the east bank of the Tennessee River to the southwest of Chattanooga, overlooking avenues of approach from the west. Lookout Mountain towered 1,500 feet over Chattanooga from the South.<sup>20</sup> The heavily forested terrain favored the defense. Bragg succeeded in building strong defensive positions in and around the city of Chattanooga. However, instead of concentrating his forces and establishing mobile defense routes, he elected to spread his troops too thinly along the eastern bank of the river.

Bragg's defensive scheme appeared to center on the security of Chattanooga, with forces arrayed around the city mostly oriented to the north. Polk's corps was posted

around Chattanooga except for an infantry brigade posted at Bridgeport on the north side of the river. The brigade at Bridgeport withdrew to Chattanooga on 21 August when pickets reported Union troops at Bridgeport. After that, Bragg had virtually no presence on the west bank of the Tennessee.

### Hill's Actions at Chattanooga

Hill initially focused on cutting the fat of the corps, reducing straggling, and instilling discipline into the ranks. Major J. W. Ratchford commented, "The generals of the Army of Tennessee were a royal set."<sup>21</sup> Since Hardee had taken eighteen of his wagons with him to Mississippi and Hill had arrived with none, he took three from the quartermaster. His artillery troops were lazily riding on carriages instead of marching. Many officers of the corps were approaching an elitist attitude. Some elected to escape the hardships their troops endured by sleeping in houses. Still others had taken to the practice of using enlisted troops as personal servants. Hill ordered all officers back to camp life with the troops and outlawed the use of personal servants. The result was six hundred soldiers restored to the ranks. To curtail straggling, he instituted hourly halts while on the march and threatened to arrest officers who did not fully account for their men.<sup>22</sup>

Hill established his headquarters at Tyner's Station, a few miles east of Chattanooga via the Knoxville railroad. Initially, Major Generals A. P. Stewart and Patrick Cleburne were his division commanders. Stewart would soon march north to assist Major General Simon Buckner at Loudon. On 28 August, Hill would gain John Breckinridge's and W. H. T Walker's divisions from Mississippi. Walker's Division

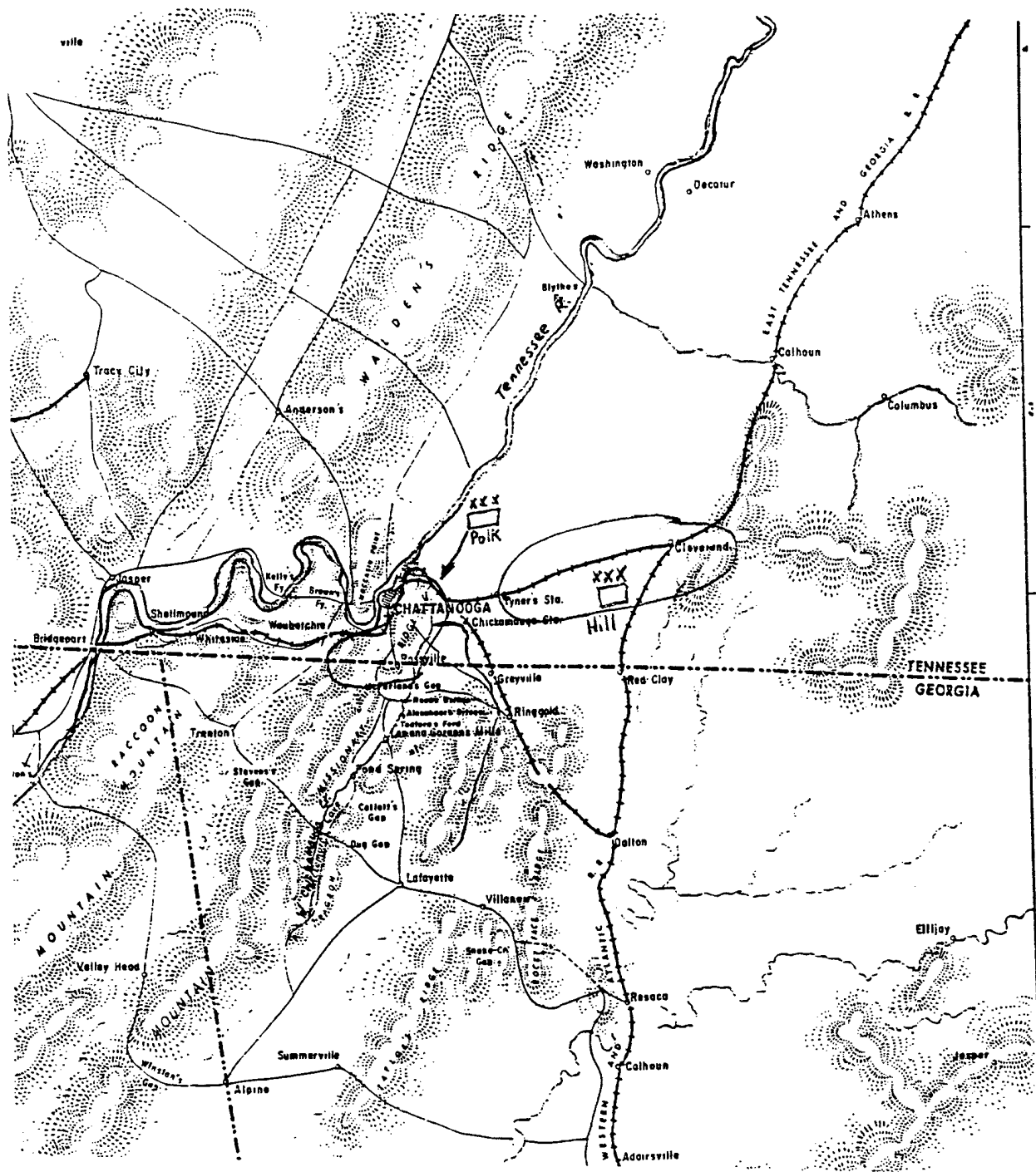


Figure 1. Chattanooga and vicinity. Source: Thomas Griess, *Atlas for the American Civil War* (Wayne, NJ: Avery Publishing Group Inc., 1986), 39.



would eventually become the army reserve. John Breckinridge was a prominent politician before the war. He served as vice-president of the United States under James Buchanan and as a congressman and senator for his home state of Kentucky. One of the few political officers that Hill respected, Breckinridge had likewise proved himself an able commander at Shiloh and Murfreesboro.

Before Hill arrived, Cleburne had carefully constructed four large forts in and around Tyner's Station to guard the railroad and avenue of approach into Chattanooga. Each fort had twelve-foot high walls and was two hundred to three hundred feet in diameter.<sup>23</sup> Although Cleburne lacked formal officer training, he had a natural talent for leadership. Born in Ireland, he served as a corporal in the British Army before immigrating to Helena, Arkansas. When the war broke out, he left his law practice and enlisted. Respected as a tenacious fighter in the Confederate leadership circle, he had earned a reputation for success. Lee called him a meteor; Davis referred to him as the "Stonewall Jackson of the West." Hill and Cleburne quickly established a mutual respect.<sup>24</sup> In a biographical sketch of Cleburne after the war, Hill said of the Irish general:

Habitually thoughtful and grave, he was considered cold and repellant in manner by those who only met him in his official capacity; but to his intimate friends, he was genial and pleasant in conversation; with, at times, a real sparkling of Irish wit and humor that would bring the hearty laugh from auditors responsive to his rather grim smile.<sup>25</sup>

Hill spread his corps between Tyner's Station and Cleveland along the East Tennessee and Georgia Railroad. Brown's Brigade of Stewart's Division was posted at Sivley's Ford. Clayton's Brigade defended Blythe's Ferry and Johnson's Brigade watched over Loudon, seventy miles north of Chattanooga. Wood's Brigade of

Cleburne's Division camped at Harrison, within supporting distance of Sivley's Ford and Blythe's Ferry. Hindman's Division from Polk's Corps augmented the defense line north of Chattanooga. Wheeler's Cavalry Corps was posted south of Chattanooga at the base of Sand and Raccoon Mountains along the Tennessee River. Only five hundred of the eleven thousand cavalymen under his command were guarding river crossings south of Chattanooga. Brigadier General Nathan Bedford Forrest's Cavalry Division was posted along the Tennessee River north of Chattanooga.<sup>26</sup>

On the Union side, Rosecrans was feeling pressure from Washington to begin aggressive operations against Bragg. Rosecrans stoically gathered his supplies and waited for an opportunity to strike. On 16 August, when preparations were complete, he began movement toward Chattanooga. The mountainous terrain around Chattanooga favored a movement from the north, where Rosecrans could control the Western and Atlantic Railroads, Bragg's lifeline to Atlanta. By implementing a plausible deception plan, he would convince Bragg that his right flank was threatened.<sup>27</sup>

Supporting his deception plan, Rosecrans sent Crittenden's corps toward the Sequatchie River valley to lurk behind Walden's Ridge and Thomas' corps directly to the Tennessee River. McCook's corps quietly marched to Bellefont and Stevenson, Alabama, southwest of Chattanooga on the Tennessee River. A cavalry detachment conducted demonstrations along the Tennessee River to the north to convince Bragg and others the attack would come from there.<sup>28</sup>

Rosecrans' deception plan was in full progress. Groups of soldiers appeared at virtually every ford and crossing site along the Tennessee River from Chattanooga north seventy miles. Two to three artillery pieces moved through openings and clearings

visible to Confederate pickets. Troops hammered loudly on metal to simulate boat construction. Wood chips thrown into the river from concealed positions reinforced Confederate pickets suspicions of an imminent crossing. Tents were pitched and fires built along Walden's Ridge to assure Bragg and his lieutenants the impending attack would come from the north.<sup>29</sup> Rosecrans' deceptive actions thoroughly paralyzed Bragg's intelligence network, thereby allowing Federal forces the time and space to cross the river unhindered. Scouts reported troops building pontoons near Jasper, at the mouth of Battle Creek. Other reports claimed a large force was near Brown's Ferry, and still others reported that Federal troops were moving to cross at Stevenson and Bridgeport. The most reliable intelligence reports were only speculation, but Bragg required hard facts to make a decision.<sup>30</sup>

Hill grew uneasy about the lack of reliable information in Bragg's headquarters. His initial impressions of Bragg's command structure were bleak. Hill, as he said after the war, could overlook many deficiencies, but lack of good intelligence was not one of them:

The want of information at General Bragg's headquarters was in striking contrast to the minute knowledge General Lee always had of every operation in his front, and I was most painfully impressed with the feeling that it was to be a haphazard campaign on our part.<sup>31</sup>

My sympathies had all been with Bragg. I knew of the carping criticisms of his subordinates and the cold looks of his soldiers, and knew that these were the natural results of reverses, whether the blame lay with the commander or otherwise. I felt too that this lack of confidence or enthusiasm, whichever it may be, was ominous of evil for the impending battle. Nevertheless, ignorance of the enemy's movements seemed still a worse portent.<sup>32</sup>

Hill's transition into the Army of Tennessee was proving a difficult one. Though he had been quick to criticize many of Lee's strategic decisions in the Army of Northern

Virginia, he now longed for the more orderly and efficient *modus operandi* he had grown accustomed to.

While Confederate soldiers were at church services listening to a sermon, Federal troops appeared on the riverbank opposite Chattanooga and began shelling the city with artillery on 21 August.<sup>33</sup> It hardly seems a coincidence that Rosecrans picked this day to begin his offensive maneuvers, as it had been declared a national prayer day for the Confederacy. Although there were few casualties from the shelling, it served as a wake-up call of sorts for Bragg and his lieutenants. Troops were dispersed in such a way that they could not capitalize on their interior lines to reinforce attempted crossings. Bragg did not have enough troops to defend all the crossings and he did not have a mobile reserve identified. Reacting to this, he quickly telegraphed J. E. Johnston, pleading for reinforcements from Mississippi. Johnston grudgingly sent Breckinridge's and Walker's divisions north. Walker's was poorly equipped and manned, but it would have to suffice. Hill sent a portion of Clayton's brigade north of the Hiwassee River to guard potential crossings. Clayton quickly began building a bridge across the Hiwassee to support the army's shaky interior lines.<sup>34</sup>

On 22 August, Bragg began groping for ideas. His chief of staff sent a letter to Hill giving general guidance and asking for inputs:

General plan is to await developments of the enemy and when his point of attack is ascertained, to neglect all smaller affairs and fall on him with our whole force. He further instructs me to say that he hopes you will at all times, in person or by letter, give him any suggestion that may occur to you in furtherance of this great and common cause. You cannot, general offend even by importunity. He has called upon Richmond and Johnston for reinforcements.<sup>35</sup>

Hill took this open invitation for advice during a council of war. According to Brigadier General St. John Liddell, when it came Hill's turn to express his opinion of future operations, Hill recommended crossing back over the Tennessee River and occupying east Tennessee. Liddell quickly stated that they had no way to cross the mountains and furthermore, the crops in that region were already exhausted. The discussion continued for a time until Bragg stood up and called the idea absurd and demanded it not be mentioned again.<sup>36</sup> Hill's sensitive ego had been injured in the presence of his fellow officers. He would not offer pointed advice to Bragg after this encounter. He soon realized that any advice given to Bragg had to be within certain parameters or suffer heavy censorship. Not sure what those parameters were, Hill rapidly withdrew from his new commander and entered a self-preservation mode. Though Hill readily offered opinionated criticism to others, it was difficult for him to accept the same.

On 23 August, Buckner provided Bragg with intelligence on Rosecrans' movements that affirmed his belief an attack would come from the north. His scouts reported that Rosecrans would cross the Tennessee River above Hiwassee and join forces with Major General Ambrose Burnside's independent corps at Loudon. Hill and Polk agreed with this assessment. By 25 August, it appeared to Bragg that enemy activity had ceased and Rosecrans was awaiting Burnside's arrival.<sup>37</sup> The Confederate commanders remained stubbornly convinced that Rosecrans would come from the north.

Breckinridge and Walker arrived from Mississippi to join Hill. Breckinridge moved to Chickamauga Station, while Walker assumed reserve duties, with first priority towards reinforcing Breckinridge. Wharton's cavalry was posted in front of Hill's corps along the river crossings and Cleburne began to concentrate his division at Harrison.<sup>38</sup>

By 29 August, scouts reported Rosecrans' headquarters was located southwest of Stevenson, Alabama. Bragg still held to his assumption that Rosecrans would attack from the northeast. Colonel Ben Hill, a regimental commander at Thatcher's Ferry, midway between the mouth of the Hiwassee River and Harrison's Landing, convinced Bragg (and Hill) that the shelling of Chattanooga was a diversion by a small element of McCook's Corps. He contended that one of McCook's divisions was still at Murfreesboro and the other two were scattered from Stevenson to Bridgeport.<sup>39</sup>

It was not until two days later that Rosecrans' plan started to become evident to Bragg. Hill recounted the following in his official report:

On Sunday, 31 August we learned almost accidentally through a citizen that the Yankees corps of Thomas and McCook had crossed at Caperton's Ferry, beginning the movement the Thursday before. This was a natural point of crossing for the Yankees as it was near their depot at Stevenson and gave them a good road on our flank and rear.<sup>40</sup>

Though Hill lashed out at the overall lack of intelligence, nothing indicates he warned Bragg that Caperton's Ferry was a "natural point of crossing," until after the fact. Nevertheless, Bragg's inaction had begun to agitate Hill. Though he was not about to recommend a course of action to Bragg, he knew aggressiveness was the only way to avert disaster. He sent an anxious letter to Bragg on 3 September:

If the Yankees have really crossed in force at Caperton's, it seems to me plain that the movement is for Chattanooga, in order to secure the railroad. . . . They have evidently spared Chattanooga with the view of using it hereafter; otherwise they would destroy the town and depot. The great object is east Tennessee. I have no idea that a movement of infantry will be made against Atlanta. The mounted men will be put upon that work. Rosecrans will avoid battle till Grant is ready to move. The whole Yankee policy for some time has been that of combined movement. They have had one controlling mind, while we have had no combinations whatever. If we cannot get a fight from Rosecrans before Grant shall move, Johnston will want help and another retreat becomes inevitable.

I know the country too imperfectly and have too little confidence in my own judgement to counsel any particular course of action, but I have felt so uneasy about the delay that I cannot refrain from expressing my anxiety. If we wait until the meshes be thrown around, we may find it hard to break through. If it ever becomes practicable for us to take the initiative at any time, we would thereby effectually frustrate Rosecrans as you did at Murfreesboro by the same course.<sup>41</sup>

Usually not prone to identify problems without recommending a course of action, Hill surprisingly begged ignorance, asking his commanding officer for action in general terms. Thinking his advice would go unheeded, he pleaded ignorance to the terrain and downplayed his own confidence. He had begun to get a glimpse of the way Bragg solved problems in the West and was not sure how to assert his influence. Had he spent more energy developing a trusting relationship with his new commander he may have been able to exert more influence on the outcome of events.

Had Hill understood the maneuvering Rosecrans used to push Bragg's army to the banks of the Tennessee River, he would have given him more credit during this campaign. Rosecrans' strategy was much broader than the town of Chattanooga. McCook's corps went through Winston's Gap in Lookout Mountain to the west, forty miles from Chattanooga. Thomas marched to Stevens Gap on Lookout Mountain, twenty miles south of Chattanooga. Crittenden's corps moved out of the Sequatchie river valley, crossed the Tennessee River at Bridgeport, and moved along the Tennessee River to Chattanooga.<sup>42</sup> In reality, Rosecrans was conducting a great turning movement to cut Bragg off from his supply line to Atlanta. His strategy was brilliant except for the fact that he overestimated Bragg's reluctance to fight.

Bragg thought the Union Army was moving in two columns, one towards Rome, the other towards Chattanooga. He saw this as an opportunity to exploit the separation

and sought the advice of Hill on the prospect of crossing the river to attack the corps opposite Chattanooga:

Dear General: There is no doubt of the enemy's position now; one corps opposite you, and two this side of the river from Shellmound by Bridgeport to Caperton's, the point of first crossing. A part of the latter are reported moving down Will's Valley toward Gadsden or perhaps Rome; Wheeler is gone to develop them and Walker goes by railroad to Rome to head them off from our communications. If you can cross the river, now is our time to crush the corps opposite. What say you? Or if we could draw the enemy over. We must do something and that soon. . . . The crushing of this corps would give us a great victory and redeem Tennessee. Can you be the instrument to do it? Consult Cleburne. He is cool, full of resources, and ever alive to a success. Then give me your views, or call with Cleburne and see what our resources are.<sup>43</sup>

Asked to accomplish a task that had earlier been vehemently opposed by his commander, Hill must have been dumbfounded. It was a last minute thought: preparations were lacking for a counterattack across the river. Stung by Bragg for recommending a similar course of action just days prior this invitation, Hill was more alarmed by the vacillating opinions of his commander. He forwarded a copy of the letter to Cleburne, seeking his advice. Cleburne received it the next day and responded in kind:

I am of the opinion that we should crush the corps opposite us if we can. I do not know, however, what forces you have. I have a fraction over five thousand men. I do not know how we could cross our artillery. This is a necessary calculation, as the enemy have time to fortify, and doubtless have done so at the foot of the mountain.<sup>44</sup>

Armed with Cleburne's opinion, Bragg dropped the idea of attacking across the river. Bragg and Hill were doing exactly what Rosecrans hoped, fixing on the riverbank while he swept around them. However, in his reaction to Rosecrans' push towards Rome, Georgia, Bragg sent Wheeler to guard it, leaving discretionary orders to return to him if defending it was impracticable.<sup>45</sup>



On 5 September, Bragg seemed ready to move to protect his lines of communication that were threatened at Rome, Georgia. The movement was to begin at nightfall. Polk's Corps would lead the way down the LaFayette Road to Summerville. Hill was to follow him by the same route. However, Bragg cancelled the order when Breckinridge erroneously reported that Burnside had turned south to join Rosecrans and that Crittenden was demonstrating at Confederate outposts on the northern end of Lookout Mountain near Chattanooga.<sup>46</sup>

Desperate for answers, Bragg called another council of war on 7 September. He was searching for concrete evidence of Rosecrans' intentions and whereabouts. An officer present at the meeting described the feeling as "One of great doubt as to the movements of the enemy. We all want to fight him, the question is can we make him fight us?"<sup>47</sup> During the council, both Polk and Hill advised against abandoning Chattanooga, insisting they could defend it against a superior force. Bragg succumbed to his corps commanders and temporarily agreed not to abandon Chattanooga. Both felt that defending the city was more important than protecting their lines of communication. Though Bragg initially yielded to their advice, later the same evening he ordered the evacuation of Chattanooga.<sup>48</sup> In his account of Chickamauga, Hill explained his reasoning for wanting to defend the city:

The place could have been held by a division against greatly superior forces. By holding Chattanooga in that way, Crittenden's corps would have been neutralized, and a union between Rosecrans and Burnside would have been impossible. Moreover, the town was the objective point of the campaign and to lose it was to lose all East Tennessee south of Knoxville.<sup>49</sup>

Abandoning all the hard work that went into fortifying the city would compound the despair of the demoralized troops. Defending Chattanooga was the Confederate

objective. If Bragg intended to hand over Chattanooga from the start, his deception plan of fortifying the city was at the expense the morale of his army. Bragg failed to make full use of his available battle space. A layered early warning system around Chattanooga would have allowed him the time and space to isolate and destroy Rosecrans' army in small chunks without surrendering the objective. He was reacting just as Rosecrans had hoped by falling back on his lines of communication. In a letter to the War Department, Bragg openly admitted that he was not prepared to fight on the offensive. Instead, he was inclined to fall back on his supply lines and wait for Rosecrans to make a mistake.

My position is to some extent embarrassing in regard to offensive movements. In a country so utterly destitute we cannot for a moment abandon our lines of communications, and are unable to detach a sufficient force to guard it, we must necessarily maneuver between the enemy and our supplies<sup>50</sup>

Bragg fell back on his lines and briefly yielded the initiative to the Union Army. In contrast, Rosecrans had quietly prepared a month to bolster his supplies and take the offensive.

Hill's understanding of this phase of the operation (river defense of Chattanooga) was better than Bragg's in the sense that Chattanooga was the objective, and it should be held at all costs. Yet, his failure to develop a trusting relationship with Bragg prevented him from exerting significant influence. Had Bragg trusted Hill, he may have adopted his recommended course of action, which was to defend Chattanooga. Holding the city and attacking Rosecrans on the opposite bank would have afforded the Army of Tennessee a chance for a tactical and strategic victory. The tactical victory eventually won by Bragg at Chickamauga would be at the expense of Chattanooga and Eastern Tennessee. Bragg failed to see the utility of using the Tennessee River as a benefit instead of a

disadvantage. The formidable river was equally as daunting for the Union to cross as it was for the Confederates to defend.

#### McLemore's Cove

Hill's Corps led the evacuation late on 7 September, down the road to Rossville and LaFayette, which ran parallel to Pigeon Mountain. It bivouacked that night on the west side of Chickamauga Creek at Lee and Gordon's Mill. The next morning, they continued to march for fourteen miles to LaFayette, reaching it at nightfall on 8 September. LaFayette was about three miles east of Pigeon Mountain and twenty-two miles south of Chattanooga. Polk camped near Chickamauga Creek the first night, and then continued on to Lee and Gordon's Mill on 8 September. Buckner and Walker trailed the two corps on Ringgold Road. Wheeler's Division of cavalry picketed the passes on Lookout Mountain. Forrest's cavalry pulled rear guard for Buckner.<sup>51</sup>

Late on 8 September and early on 9 September, cavalry commander Will Martin reported to Wheeler that his pickets on Lookout Mountain were driven from Cooper's and Stevens' Gaps across McLemore's Cove and up to the crest of Pigeon Mountain. Consequently, Bragg ordered Hill to block the three gaps in Pigeon Mountain; Catlett's, Dug, and Bluebird. The gaps had already been obstructed with felled timber by Martin's cavalry. Wood's Brigade from Cleburne's Division picketed the three gaps while Breckinridge guarded the supply train and reserve artillery at LaFayette. Cleburne established his headquarters by the road leading to Dug Gap while his remaining two brigades camped at LaFayette.<sup>52</sup>

Pigeon Mountain was a spur from Lookout Mountain that paralleled it for nearly twenty miles northeast to southwest. McLemore's Cove is a valley between the

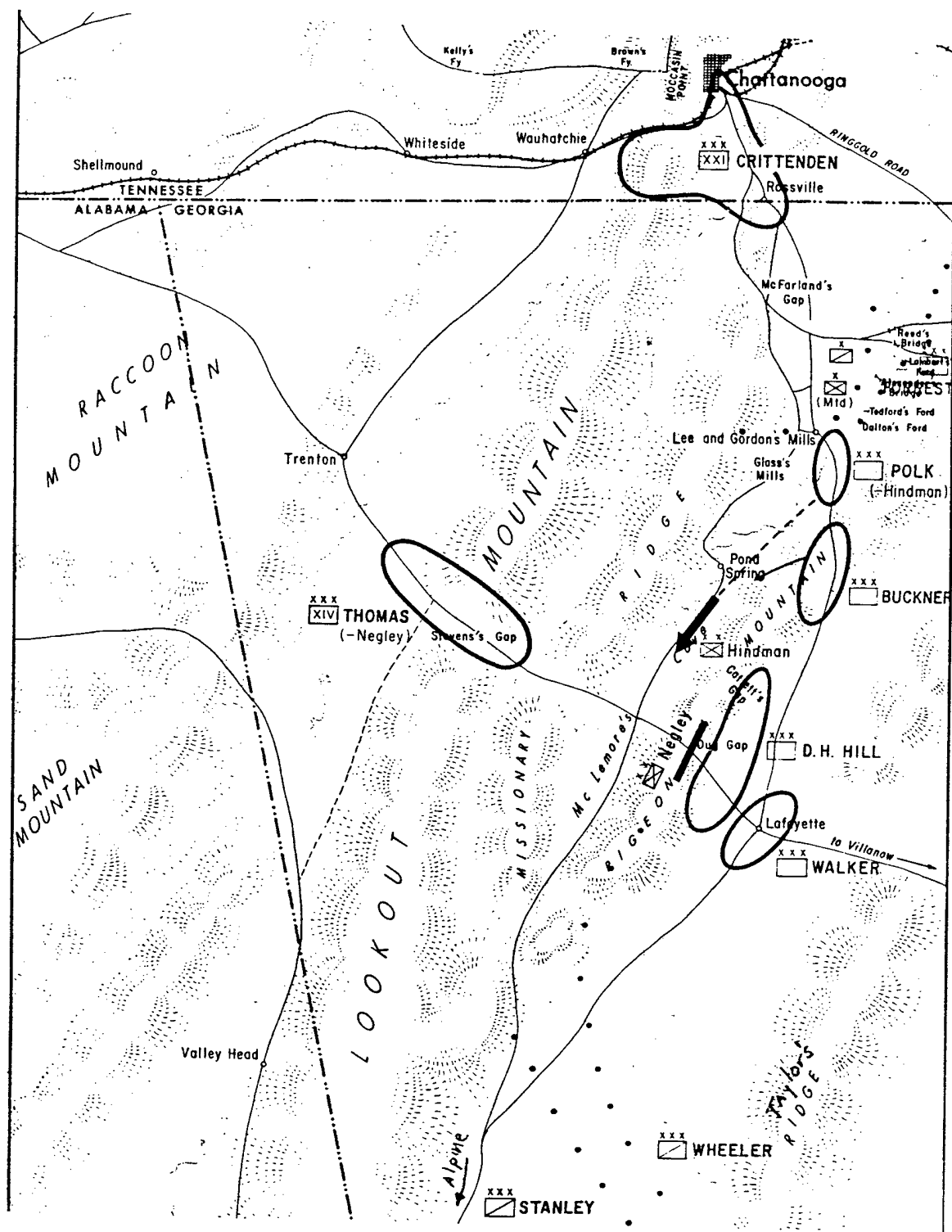


Figure 2. McLemore's Cove, 10 September, 1863. Source: Griess, *Atlas for the American Civil War*, 41.

mountains about six miles wide, the only outlets being a few gaps on Lookout Mountain and Pigeon Mountain. West Chickamauga Creek starts at the Southwest end of McLemore's Cove, flowing northeast through the cove. Dug Gap is four miles northwest of LaFayette. Davis Crossroads is two miles directly northwest of Dug Gap in the cove. On the Lookout Mountain side of the cove lie Stevens' and Cooper's Gaps, two miles apart.

On 9 September, a division of Rosecrans' army left the safety of Lookout Mountain on an excursion down into McLemore's Cove via the narrow confines of Stevens' Gap. Bragg had a rare opportunity to mass his forces and defeat a smaller portion of the Union Army. Although he did not know the exact strength of the force in the cove, Bragg aptly recognized a window of opportunity opening. Bragg's scheme of attack was to isolate the Union division from the northern (open) end of the cove. He would accomplish this by sending down Hindman's Division of Polk's Corps, the nearest to his headquarters. Then, Cleburne's Division would attack through Dug Gap to assail the Federal flank. This combined assault would, in effect, outnumber and annihilate the inferior Union force, or capture it. Bragg would then be free to attack another of the isolated corps of Rosecrans' three-pronged advance.<sup>53</sup>

At 11:45 P.M. on 9 September, Bragg issued the order for Hindman to march to Davis' Crossroads in McLemore's Cove. Once there, he was to link up with Cleburne's Division sent down from Dug Gap.

You will move with your division immediately to Davis' Crossroads, on the road from LaFayette to Steven's Gap. At this point you will put yourself in communication with the column of General Hill, ordered to move to the same point, and take command of the joint forces, or report to the officer commanding Hill's column according to rank. If in command you will move upon the enemy,

reported to be 4,000 or 5,000 strong, encamped at the foot of Lookout Mountain at Stevens' Gap. Another column of the enemy is reported to be at Cooper's Gap, to the right of Stevens' Gap; number unknown.<sup>54</sup>

Hindman received the orders shortly and began moving his division between 1:00 A.M. and 2:00 A.M. His orders were plainly worded and absolute; there was no room for interpretation. A copy of the orders was sent to Hill's headquarters at LaFayette with the following peculiar addition:

General Bragg directs that you send or take, as your judgement dictates, Cleburne's division to unite with General Hindman at Davis' Cross-roads tomorrow morning. . . . If unforeseen circumstances should prevent your movement, notify Hindman. . . . Open communications with Hindman with your cavalry in advance of the junction.<sup>55</sup>

Perhaps Bragg's trust in Hill was as wanting as Hill's in Bragg. A corps commander should not need a reminder to send a message if he cannot make an expected movement. Bragg's choice of words indicated a reluctance to bear full responsibility for the attack, should it fail. Not trusting Hill and averse to assuming personal responsibility for this risky operation, Bragg gave Hill implied discretion.

Distrusting Bragg's estimate of the situation, Hill had a "discretionary loophole" to escape what he thought to be certain annihilation. Hindman had thirteen miles to march while Hill had at least nine miles to cover from LaFayette to Davis' Cross-roads.<sup>56</sup> Instead of making a forthright reply, he wrote to Bragg that the timing of the operation was poor since he received the orders five hours after Hindman. Furthermore, Hill said that Cleburne was sick, and one of his brigades covered three gaps, while the other two were at LaFayette. He also complained that Dug Gap was heavily obstructed with timber. He recommended that Hindman's movement be halted (or postponed) until that

evening. After notifying Bragg of his decision to exercise discretion, Hill sent the following message to Hindman:

General Bragg's order did not reach me till 5 o'clock this morning. It directed Cleburne's division to cooperate with you. That officer was sick, and four of his best regiments were absent. . . The road across Dug Gap is strongly blockaded, and if Cleburne had started he could not have gotten to you till after night. Under the discretionary orders received from General Bragg, I therefore decided not to move Cleburne. I immediately wrote to him to that effect, but have heard nothing as yet. General Wheeler reports that the Yankees are moving on Summerville in force. If that be so, this division of Negley's is sent out as bait to draw us off from below. When it is pressed, (unless he has a strong supporting force), he will fall back in the gap, and there the matter will end.<sup>57</sup>

Thus, Hindman had conflicting opinions from two senior officers on the probability of success. While Bragg was ordering him to attack, Hill was warning of the possibility of ambush. Spooked by the contrasting opinions, Hindman was not sure whether he should execute the mission or preserve himself.

It is probable that Hill had no intention of giving up his high ground in the gaps, risking entrapment of his force and being outside of supporting distance from Breckinridge and the crucial supply trains and reserve artillery. He still felt the sting from South Mountain almost a year ago to the day when he held off the entire Army of the Potomac while Jackson and others got the glory of retaking Harper's Ferry. His skeptical view of cavalry added to his apprehension. Wheeler reported a large column of Federal troops marching toward Summerville to his south about fifteen miles away. If Wheeler could not hold them at bay and Hill relinquished the gaps, he faced certain doom. He believed the force in the cove was a ruse to lure him into a trap.

Hill was correct by asking to postpone the operation. Since he did not receive the order until five hours after Hindman, and he had about the same distance to cover, it

would be impossible to conduct a link-up that morning. However, he should have issued orders to Cleburne to begin assembling his division for an attack. He failed to take any steps to effect a junction with Hindman. The other excuses he made were unsupportable. Brigadier General Martin, the cavalry commander of the men who felled the trees in Dug Gap headquartered in Lafayette. Had Hill simply asked him how long it would take to clear the obstructions, he would have been told it would only take two hours. Wood's Brigade, already posted at Dug Gap, could have cleared the timber while Cleburne assembled his division. Hill was misinformed that Cleburne was sick. Why Hill thought he was ill in bed may never be known.<sup>58</sup>

Still wanting to crush the Union force in the cove, Bragg ordered Major General Buckner's Corps to augment Hindman as a substitute for Hill. Similar to the orders issued to Hindman, Buckner's left no wiggle room for discretion:

General Hill has found it impossible to carry out the part assigned to Cleburne's division. The general commanding desires that you will execute without delay the orders issued to General Hill. You can move to Davis' Cross-Roads by the direct road from your present position at Anderson's, along which General Hindman has passed.<sup>59</sup>

Buckner reached Hindman at 4:45 P.M. Hindman, probably anxious by Hill's message, directed Buckner to remain behind his force to maintain a secure retreat route through Worthen's Gap, should the need arise. Not sure what to do, Hindman called a council of war. The result was inaction and a conclusion that more information was needed before he would proceed. Hindman sent a messenger to inform Bragg.<sup>60</sup>

At 10:00 A.M. on 10 September, Hill's picket force in Dug Gap reported that he had just finished a reconnaissance and found "the enemy perfectly careless. . . . They have no idea that we have any forces in this section."<sup>61</sup> This report probably helped Hill



come to the conclusion that the force in the cove was not a bait to lure him down, but instead an overextended force outside of supporting distance from any other Union element. Hence, Hill began preparing Cleburne's two brigades to move into Dug Gap.

Bragg decided it was time to make a personal reconnaissance of the situation, arriving at Hill's headquarters about 11:30 P.M. on the tenth. Hill's message to Hindman must have affected his estimate of the situation. Major Nocquet, Hindman's messenger, informed Bragg of Hindman's belief that the Union force in the cove was a decoy to mask an attack from the south. This was the very idea Hill had conveyed to Hindman earlier that morning. At this point Bragg called in Will Martin for his inputs. Martin told him there was not a threat to the south. Bragg then restated his orders for Hindman to attack the next morning at daylight.<sup>62</sup>

Early on the morning of 11 September, Bragg and Hill rode to the gap. Cleburne and Walker were in position to assail the Union front after they heard the sound of Hindman's guns. They would wait nearly all day before hearing guns. Hindman would again fail to attack. In his official report, Hill described the situation:

It was understood that Hindman and Buckner would attack at daylight and these other divisions were to cooperate with them. The attack, however, did not begin at the hour designated, and so imperfect was the communication with Hindman that it was noon before he could be heard from. I was then directed to move with the divisions of Cleburne and Walker and make a front attack upon the Yankees . . . . Cleburne's whole force was advancing on their line of battle when I was halted by an order from General Bragg. The object was, as supposed, to wait until Hindman got in the Yankees rear. About an hour before sundown, I was ordered once more to advance, but the Yankees now rapidly retired.<sup>63</sup>

Hill's first opportunity for decisive action in the Army of Tennessee was mired by his lack of trust for Bragg and Bragg's for him. At the division commander level, one could be relatively successful with a direct leadership approach. However, a corps

commander in the Civil War needed strong organizational leadership skills in order to be effective. By not sending couriers to Cleburne and Martin, seeking their opinions, he failed to use his staff effectively. Had he taken this simple step he would have learned the timber obstructions in Dug Gap were not severe and Cleburne not sick. There is a difference between a council of war and seeking counsel. Instead of seeking counsel, he relied on his personal judgment, judgment tainted by his nearly disastrous stand at South Mountain a year earlier. Because of this, he was reluctant to surrender the high ground. When he finally realized McLemore's Cove was an incredible opportunity, it was too late to have a decisive effect.

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<sup>1</sup>Thomas Griess, *The Civil War* (Wayne, NJ: Avery Publishing Group Inc., 1986), 169.

<sup>2</sup>Hal Bridges, *Lee's Maverick General: Daniel Harvey Hill* (New York, NY: McGraw-Hill, 1961), 193-194. (Hereafter cited as *Lee's Maverick General*.)

<sup>3</sup>Felicity Allen, *Jefferson Davis: Unconquerable Heart* (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 1999), 329-330.

<sup>4</sup>Daniel Harvey Hill, "Chickamauga: The Great Battle of the West," *Battles and Leaders of the Civil War*, 3 volumes (New York, NY: The Century Company, 1888), vol. 3, part 2, 639. (Hereafter cited as *Battles and Leaders*.)

<sup>5</sup>Robert Lewis Johnson, *Confederate Staff Work at Chickamauga: An Analysis of the Staff of the Army of Tennessee* (MMAS Thesis, Command and General Staff College, Ft. Leavenworth, KS, 1992), 84.

<sup>6</sup>*The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*, 70 vols. (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1880-1901), Series I, vol. 30, part 4, 949-950. (Hereafter cited as *O.R.*)

<sup>7</sup>Bridges, *Lee's Maverick General*, 24, 46, 152.

<sup>8</sup>*Ibid.*, 152.

<sup>9</sup>Hill, *Battles and Leaders*, vol. 3, 641.

<sup>10</sup>Bridges, *Lee's Maverick General*, 196.

<sup>11</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>12</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup>*Ibid.*, 197.

<sup>14</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>15</sup>Hill, *Battles and Leaders*, vol. 3, 639.

<sup>16</sup>*Ibid.*, 639.

<sup>17</sup>Thomas Connelly, *Autumn of Glory: The Army of Tennessee, 1862-1865* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1971), 155-156. (Hereafter cited as *Autumn of Glory*.)

<sup>18</sup>Peter Cozzens, *This Terrible Sound* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1992), 39.

<sup>19</sup>Griess, *The Civil War*, 174.

<sup>20</sup>Griess, *The Civil War*, 174; *The Campaign for Chattanooga* (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, Chickamauga and Chattanooga National Park Commission, 1902), 11.

<sup>21</sup>Bridges, *Lee's Maverick General*, 200.

<sup>22</sup>*O.R.*, vol. 30, part 4, 580; Bridges, *Lee's Maverick General*, 200.

<sup>23</sup>*O.R.*, vol. 30, part 4, 561; Bridges, *Lee's Maverick General*, 199; Howell and Elizabeth Purdue, *Pat Cleburne, Confederate General: A Definitive Biography* (Hillsboro, TX: Hill Jr. College Press, 1973) 203, (Hereafter cited as *Cleburne*.); Hill, *Battles and Leaders*, vol. 3, 641.

<sup>24</sup>Purdue, *Cleburne*, 14, 19-22, 204, 207.

<sup>25</sup>*Ibid.*, 204.

<sup>26</sup>Purdue, *Cleburne*, 203, 229; *The Civil War*, 40; Hill, *Battles and Leaders*, vol. 3, 639; Connelly, *Autumn of Glory*, 170; *O.R.*, vol. 30, part 2, 136; *O.R.*, vol. 30, part 4, 544.

<sup>27</sup>*O.R.*, vol. 28, 552; *The Civil War*, 175.

- <sup>28</sup>Griess, *The Civil War*, 175.
25. <sup>29</sup>John B. Turchin, *Chickamauga* (Chicago, IL: Fergus Printing Company, 1888),
- <sup>30</sup>Connelly, *Autumn of Glory*, 166-167, 170.
- <sup>31</sup>Hill, *Battles and Leaders*, vol. 3, 640.
- <sup>32</sup>*Ibid.*
- <sup>33</sup>Connelly, *Autumn of Glory*, 166; *O.R.*, vol. 30, part 4, 527.
- <sup>34</sup>*O.R.*, vol. 30, part 4, 529, 545.
- <sup>35</sup>*Ibid.*, 531.
136. <sup>36</sup>St. John Liddell, *Liddell's Record* (Dayton, OH: Morningside House Inc., 1985),
- <sup>37</sup>*O.R.*, vol. 30, part 4, 544, 547; Connelly, *Autumn of Glory*, 166-167.
- <sup>38</sup>*O.R.*, vol. 30, part 4, 564, 561.
- <sup>39</sup>Connelly, *Autumn of Glory*, 169; *O.R.*, vol. 30, part 4, 564.
- <sup>40</sup>*O.R.*, vol. 30, part 2, 137.
- <sup>41</sup>*O.R.*, vol. 30, part 4, 588.
- <sup>42</sup>Griess, *The Civil War*, 176.
- <sup>43</sup>*O.R.*, vol. 30, part 4, 594.
- <sup>44</sup>*Ibid.*, 599.
- <sup>45</sup>*Ibid.*, 595.
- <sup>46</sup>Cozzens, *This Terrible Sound*, 56; *O.R.*, vol. 30, part 4, 614.
- <sup>47</sup>Cozzens, *This Terrible Sound*, 56.
- <sup>48</sup>Cozzens, *This Terrible Sound*, 56; and Connelly, *Autumn of Glory*, 172-173.

<sup>49</sup>Hill, *Battles and Leaders*, vol. 3, 641.

<sup>50</sup>*O.R.*, vol. 30, part 2, 21.

<sup>51</sup>Connelly, *Autumn of Glory*, 173; Purdue, *Pat Cleburne*, 208-209.

<sup>52</sup>Hill, *Battles and Leaders*, vol. 3, 641; *O.R.*, vol. 30, part 2, 137; Connelly, *Autumn of Glory*, 174; Purdue, *Cleburne*, 209.

<sup>53</sup>*O.R.*, vol. 30, part 2, 29.

<sup>54</sup>*Ibid.*, 28, 298.

<sup>55</sup>*Ibid.*, 28.

<sup>56</sup>Purdue, *Cleburne*, 210.

<sup>57</sup>*O.R.*, vol. 30, part 2, 298, 300.

<sup>58</sup>Purdue, *Cleburne*, 211.

<sup>59</sup>*O.R.*, vol. 30, part 2, 28.

<sup>60</sup>*Ibid.*, 293, 294, 300.

<sup>61</sup>Johnson to Hill, 10 September 1863, D. H. Hill Papers, Virginia State Library, Richmond, Virginia.

<sup>62</sup>Connelly, *Autumn of Glory*, 183-184.

<sup>63</sup>*O.R.*, vol. 30, part 2, 138-139.

## CHAPTER 3

### ROSECRANS CONSOLIDATES

#### Crittenden's Chance

Bragg returned to his headquarters at LaFayette on the evening of 11 September, unsure of the location of Thomas' and McCook's corps. Hill was reporting a strong Federal push towards LaFayette from the south. Not sure if two brigades of Thomas' or his entire corps had been in McLemore's Cove, Bragg's cavalry could not determine if the threat Hill reported was only McCook, or McCook and Thomas together.

Confederate cavalry provided little useful information in helping Bragg solve the puzzle. Martin's Division of Wheeler's Corps was in McLemore's Cove reinforcing Hindman, leaving only Wharton's Division, diminished to seven regiments, to scour the countryside for Rosecrans' army. With this reduced intelligence gathering capability, Wheeler all but admitted to Bragg that he had no idea where McCook was or where he was headed.<sup>1</sup>

Given Wheeler's lack of initiative and feeble numbers, his cavalry had become a liability to the operation.

Bragg was losing confidence in his commanders. Hill's signal troops and scouts positioned in Blue Bird Gap, atop Pigeon Mountain, reported a heavy Federal column approaching from the south on 11 September. The next day, a brisk skirmish broke out two miles south of LaFayette between Hill's infantry pickets and two regiments of Federal cavalry. The on-scene commander General Daniel Adams advised Hill that, "The boldness of the cavalry advance convinces me that an infantry column is not far off." Another brigade was brought down from Pigeon Mountain in preparation for all-out battle. According to Hill, Bragg discredited the information. On 13 September, General

Wharton sent Lieutenant Baylor to Hill's headquarters with a note corroborating Hill's belief that McCook was to his south. Lieutenant Baylor further stated that McCook's Corps had bivouacked at Alpine the night before and was moving on LaFayette. When confronted with this report, Bragg doggedly replied "Lt. Baylor lies, there is not an infantry soldier of the enemy south of us." Though Bragg would not admit to Hill the reports were true, he stated in council the next morning to his four corps commanders, that McCook was at Alpine.<sup>2</sup> McCook's official report said his force was at Alpine, Georgia, on 12 September and was ordered north on 13 September to make contact with Thomas. He was then ordered to march back through the mountains to link up with Thomas.<sup>3</sup>

What is important about this event is that distrust between Bragg and Hill was in full blossom. Even more problematic is that though Bragg did eventually believe the report, he stubbornly refused to give Hill any credit. Hill was acting on reliable information and expected his commanding officer to trust his estimate of the situation. Although McCook did not make the attack from the south, Hill's actions were prudent and reasonable. It is likely that McCook would have skirted LaFayette or McLemore's Cove in an effort to link-up with Thomas had his cavalry not been repulsed just two miles away from LaFayette and the army's supply wagons.

The Army of Tennessee's high command was beginning to unravel. This episode, and the fiasco at McLemore's Cove, added fuel to the fire of mutual distrust. Hill would not act solely on Bragg's judgment at the Cove, instead waiting until he was sure it was not a trap. Bragg, likewise, would not believe Hill's or Wharton's information about McCook's location south of LaFayette. It appeared Bragg and Hill were playing a silly

game of tit-for-tat, letting their personal pride get in the way of mission accomplishment.

To say the least, the command climate in the army was wanting:

Thus, by September 1863, his high command was afraid to take the initiative. Bragg's officers also had no confidence in his abilities. Even when Bragg gave specific orders, they were disregarded sometimes because his generals did not think he was capable of high command. The army's brief annals were filled with rump councils called by his generals. . . . In short, by mid-September matters were at an impasse with Bragg no longer trusting his officers to independent operations, while they both feared such responsibility and at the same time mistrusted his direct orders as being potentially disastrous.<sup>4</sup>

While Bragg was not certain of the whereabouts of McCook and Thomas, he did know where at least one Union corps was. Crittenden was isolated, outside of supporting distance from the other two corps. In hot pursuit of Bragg's rear, one of his divisions reached Lee and Gordon's Mill on 11 September, while the main part of his corps was in the vicinity of Ringgold, Georgia. General Leonidas Polk, a West Point graduate and personal friend of Confederate President Jefferson Davis, was soon to get his opportunity to disappoint Bragg. Seeing another opportunity to exploit the careless movements of the Union Army, Bragg ordered Polk at 3:00 A.M. on 12 September to accompany Cheatham's Division to Rock Spring Church in hopes of interposing a force between elements of Crittenden's corps to crush in detail whichever should present itself.<sup>5</sup>

Bragg's sights were set once more on a single division of infantry ripe for destruction. Later the same day Hindman's Division and Walker's Reserve Corps were ordered to join Polk. A message from Brigadier General John Pegram, a division commander in Forrest's Cavalry Corps, mistakenly suggested that a Union division was at Pea Vine Church, only two miles from Rock Spring Church. In reality, this force was only a brigade of infantry sent by Crittenden to probe south. Armed with Pegram's report,



Bragg sent an order from his headquarters at 6:00 P.M. for Polk to attack at daylight the next morning.<sup>6</sup>

GENERAL: I enclose you a dispatch from General Pegram. This presents you a fine opportunity of striking Crittenden in detail, and I hope you will avail yourself of it at daylight tomorrow. This division crushed, and the others are yours. We can then turn again on the force in the cove. Wheeler's cavalry will move on Wilder so as to cover your right. I shall be delighted to hear of your success.<sup>7</sup>

Though cordial and upbeat, the orders carried an underlying tone of hopefulness when they should have been more direct. Bragg implied that he wished Polk to attack, but did not order it outright. He appeared to be strongly suggesting an attack, but there was no finality to the directions. One may presume that Bragg realized the vague nature of the original order, and remembering the failures of his officers to act at the cove, sent a more definitive message at 8:00 P.M. that evening.

I enclose you a dispatch, marked A, and I now give you the orders of the commanding general, viz, to attack at day dawn to-morrow. The infantry column reported in said dispatch at three-quarters of a mile beyond Pea Vine Church, on the road to Graysville from LaFayette.<sup>8</sup>

Polk had indications that Crittenden had managed to consolidate his corps at Lee and Gordon's Mill by 12 September. Taking counsel of his own fears, Polk called a council of war with Walker, Cheatham, and Liddell to achieve a consensus for a plan of attack. Walker obnoxiously found fault in Polk's plan. Cheatham became disgusted with Walker's combative attitude and the meeting ended with Polk being worn out and disappointed by the fractious attitudes of his subordinates. Instead of attacking at day dawn, Polk prepared defensive positions and requested more reinforcements. Bragg ordered Buckner's Corps to Polk's assistance the next morning and rode up to Polk's headquarters himself, arriving at 9:00 A.M. When Bragg realized Polk had not attacked as ordered, he became furious. While Polk continued with modest probing actions

toward Lee and Gordon's Mill, the battle that Bragg desired did not transpire. The thirteenth ended with Polk's, Buckner's and Walker's corps opposite Crittenden's with better than a two-to-one Confederate advantage. Hill's Corps was left to guard the gaps in Pigeon Mountain, the southern approach from Alpine and the army's supply trains and reserve artillery left behind at LaFayette.<sup>9</sup>

Hill's postwar criticism of Bragg in this episode gives insightful evidence that he was not able to make a distinction between officer responsibilities at higher levels of command. Instead of rebuking Polk's cautious approach, he derided Bragg for his lack of personal involvement:

But whenever a great battle is to be fought, the commander must be on the field so that his orders are executed and to take advantage of the ever-changing phases of the conflict. Jackson leading a cavalry fight by night near Front Royal in the pursuit of Banks, Jackson at the head of a column following McClellan in the retreat from Richmond to Malvern Hill, presents a contrast to Bragg, sending, from a distance of ten miles, four consecutive orders for an attack at daylight, which he was never to witness.<sup>10</sup>

Bragg, did in fact join Polk at 9:00 A.M that morning. The "Jackson" that Hill referred to was his late brother-in-law, General Thomas "Stonewall" Jackson, who was killed at the Battle of Chancellorsville earlier that spring. It should be noted that Jackson was a division commander at both mentioned battles, not an army commander. Much like today, a nineteenth century division commander's responsibilities differed from an army commander's. Division commanders were expected to be at the battle lines with their men. Corps and army commanders' responsibilities were broader in scope. Hill clearly did not appreciate the responsibilities of higher command, and his actions as a corps commander during Chickamauga would reflect upon his myopic approach to leadership.

### Rosecrans Consolidates

The next four days, 14 to 17 September, brought an operational pause for the Army of Tennessee. Bragg's lack of initiative was perplexing. Thoroughly disgusted by yet another example of disobedience in his officer corps and worried about the looming threat to his south, Bragg abandoned his plan to attack Crittenden. While Rosecrans was desperately trying to gather his scattered force, Bragg took no offensive action, acting like the hunted instead of the hunter. His estimate of how long it would take Rosecrans to consolidate his forces was a possible factor in his cautious approach. Bragg had no idea that McCook's march from Alpine would be a circuitous, fifty-mile nightmare. Hill summed up the general feeling of inactivity:

In reference to the long intervals between battles in the West, I once said to General Patton Anderson, "When two armies confront each other in the East, they got to work very soon; but here you look at one another for days and weeks at a time." He replied with a laugh, "Oh, we out here have to crow and peck straws awhile before we use our spurs." On the 13th Rosecrans awoke from his delusion that Bragg was making a disorderly retreat, and issued his orders for the concentration of his army in McLemore's Cove.<sup>11</sup>

Aside from not knowing the whereabouts of two Union corps, another probable reason for Bragg's inaction for four days in the face of a divided enemy is that he was awaiting the arrival of Longstreet's Corps from the Army of Northern Virginia and two brigades from Mississippi. These reinforcements would bolster Bragg's numbers by 7,600 soldiers, giving him a total of over 68,000 men. While Bragg cautiously waited for reinforcements, Confederate governmental sources reported the likelihood that twenty thousand troops from Grant's army in Mississippi would reinforce Rosecrans.<sup>12</sup>

The logical place for Bragg to make this movement against Rosecrans was in the valley of West Chickamauga Creek, a long, meandering stream that flowed out of

McLemore's Cove northward along the eastern side of Missionary Ridge to the Tennessee River. Despite its sluggish appearance, the Chickamauga was deep with steep banks that prevented crossings except at bridges and fords. Rosecrans had two roads that connected his army to Chattanooga. The more prominent was LaFayette Road, which ran north from Lee and Gordon's Mill about six miles, then veered west over Missionary Ridge at Rossville Gap. Dry Valley Road was barely a wagon trail that paralleled LaFayette Road farther west for about two and one-half miles, then running west to cross Missionary Ridge at McFarland's Gap and merging with the LaFayette Road at Rossville.<sup>13</sup>

The confusion and distrust in the Confederate Army would continue to fester as the army commander called a council of war early on 15 September. Gathering Polk, Hill, Buckner, and Walker together, Bragg gave the impression that he wanted to build a consensus on an offensive plan of action. When the meeting adjourned, the corps commanders left with the idea that the next move would be a flanking action against the Union from the north. This movement would entail crossing the Chickamauga Creek and cutting off their lines of communication to Chattanooga. But Bragg's order the following morning was in stark contrast to his commanders' expectations:

VII. Buckner's corps and Walker's reserves will move at daylight tomorrow and take position from Pea Vine Church, north along Pea Vine Creek.

VIII. Polk's corps will move at 8 a.m. tomorrow and take post on Buckner's left, and occupy the ground to near Glass' Mill, so as to command that crossing.

IX. Forrest's cavalry will cover the front and flank of both these movements.

X. Wheeler's cavalry, leaving a small force to observe the road south, will pass through Dug to Catlett's Gap, press the enemy, secure some prisoners if possible, and join our flank near Glass' Mill.

XI. Reed's Bridge, Byram's Ford, Alexander's Bridge, and the fords next above, will be seized and held by our cavalry.

XII. Hill's corps will occupy the gaps across Pigeon Mountain and observe the road to the south, and be ready to move at a moment's notice.<sup>14</sup>

Vaguely worded, with no mention of infantry crossing the Chickamauga Creek or seizing the LaFayette and Dry Valley Roads, the orders left Bragg's corps commanders mystified as to what had caused him to change his mind overnight. The Union army's left flank rested at Lee and Gordon's Mill. Buckner's and Walker's corps would be well out of position for a flanking attack as Pea Vine Church was more than three and one-half miles south of Lee and Gordon's Mill. Though Glass' Mill was at least on the Chickamauga Creek, it was two and one-half miles south of Lee and Gordon's. Only the cavalry would be in a position north of the Union Flank. Bragg's plan, as his commanders understood it from the council of war, was to flank the Union north, yet the bulk of his army rested opposite the center and south of Rosecrans' force while Hill's Corps occupied the gaps of Pigeon Mountain. The order called for movements to begin on 17 September.

Early on the morning of 17 September, Bragg countermanded the orders without explanation to his commanders. Later that day his cavalry pushed through the gaps in Pigeon Mountain to ascertain the Union disposition. Federal soldiers were captured and interrogated by the Confederate horsemen. The captured prisoners of war confessed that Thomas and McCook had consolidated in McLemore's Cove, and adjoined in a north-south running line to Crittenden's Corps at Lee and Gordon's. This news of a Union juncture caused Bragg to further concentrate his army. That evening he ordered Hill to move off Pigeon Mountain at daylight on 18 September with instructions to march northward behind Polk towards Lee and Gordon's Mill.<sup>15</sup>

Then, early on 18 September Bragg changed his mind again, finally devising a tactically sound plan, if only it could be executed. He shifted the creek crossing points all the way north to Reed's Bridge, seven miles north of Lee and Gordon's Mill, putting his troops in a position to flank the Union army. According to his plan Walker and Buckner would have to cross the Chickamauga Creek at Alexander's Bridge and Thedford's Ford, respectively. They were still far to the south at Pea Vine Church. To accomplish this task, the two corps would share the same dusty road on their march north. Consequently, they became hopelessly entangled on the road, never reaching their intended crossing points until early afternoon.<sup>16</sup> The delay allowed Union defenders time to prepare for the advancing Confederates, and stubbornly defend the crossing points.

#### Hill's Alternate Plan

As ordered, Hill moved his corps down from the gaps in Pigeon Mountain on the morning of 18 September, positioning them south of Polk at Lee and Gordon's Mill. Cleburne took up a position four miles southeast of Lee and Gordon's Mill with instructions to guard the approach from the south. Breckinridge centered his division on the east bank of Chickamauga Creek, opposite Glass' Mill to guard potential crossing sites and the extreme Confederate left. Rosecrans, beginning to understand that his lines of communication to Chattanooga were threatened, began sidestepping his army north to avoid being cut off.<sup>17</sup>

Taking the initiative at Glass' Mill, Hill ordered a brigade of Breckinridge's Division across the creek to make a diversionary attack. The purpose was to make a convincing statement that the main attack was coming against Rosecrans' right flank. Skirmishers were sent across the creek and a bloody artillery duel ensued. The small

Union covering force was pushed back to Crawfish Springs with minimal effort. Hill and Breckinridge followed the attack and saw the dust from Rosecrans' infantry as it headed north. As Rosecrans was frantically peeling his units north, holes and gaps began to appear in the Federal lines. This was an excellent opportunity to exploit the weakened right flank of the Union army. As Hill recalled in his official report:

Helm's brigade of Breckinridge's division crossed over and attacked Negley's infantry and drove it off. Riding over the ground with Breckinridge, I counted eleven dead horses at the federal battery and a number of dead infantry that had not been removed. The clouds of dust rolling down the valley revealed the retirement of the foe, not on account of our pressure upon him, but on account of the urgency of the order to hurry to their left. This was the time to relieve the strain upon our right by attacking the Federal right at Lee and Gordon's. My veteran corps, under its heroic division commanders, would have flanked the enemy out of his fortifications at this point, and would by their brilliant onset have confused Rosecrans in his purpose of massing on his left; but Bragg had other plans.<sup>18</sup>

It would be another clash of personalities as Bragg called Hill to army headquarters the afternoon of 18 September. Bragg was dead set on shifting one of Hill's divisions to the Confederate extreme right. Polk, whom Bragg had placed in charge of the right, had been fighting a bitter engagement against two Union divisions and was seeking fresh troops to continue the fight. Hill had a different proposal. Based on the success of Helm's brigade at Glass' Mill earlier that day, Hill proposed that he be allowed to attack the Union right with his entire corps. Rosecrans' frantic move north created gaps and holes that were good targets to exploit. Hill insisted that his course of action was the better of the two. Bragg, however, stubbornly clung to his plan of flanking the Union right, despite overwhelming evidence that Rosecrans' left was now well north of Lee and Gordon's Mill. Hill's plan was stifled and despite grave misgivings he ordered Cleburne to march his division to Thedford's Ford.<sup>19</sup>

Bragg had not trust in Hill's judgment. And Hill had done nothing thus far to gain Bragg's trust. Even if he had trusted Hill, he probably would not change his plans. Bragg was notorious for developing a plan, then fighting the plan instead of fighting the enemy.<sup>20</sup> Hill had a good grasp on the situation and wanted to share his views and insights with his commander. Had he been allowed to attack the softened right flank of the Union, it would have most certainly relieved some pressure from Polk's attack on the Union left and at the same time created more chaos for Rosecrans to deal with. Bragg's situational awareness was quickly eroding and he began to cling to the only thing he knew for sure, his plan. Although slow to act at McLemore's Cove, Hill smelled a battle now. Seeing opportunity through his own eyes had sharpened his senses, for the moment at least.

### The Night Fight

Cleburne's division marched to Bragg's headquarters at Thedford's Ford, a six-mile trip. Bragg's orders were vague; Polk was in charge of the right wing and Cleburne was to report to him. Hill, eager for a fight and not seeing a need to stay with Breckinridge's blocking division, went forward with Cleburne to get his first taste of battle with the Army of Tennessee. Crossing Thedford's Ford at about 4:00 P.M., their progress was hindered by a long line of supply trains and artillery on the road. Bragg urged them to march at the double quick. Daylight was fading as they arrived in front of William Jay's sawmill. Cleburne positioned his division three hundred yards behind the line of Confederates that had earlier been repulsed. Wood's Brigade took up the center, with Deshler on the left and Lucius Polk on the right. Taking about thirty minutes to ensure alignment of his division, Cleburne commenced the night attack. Although



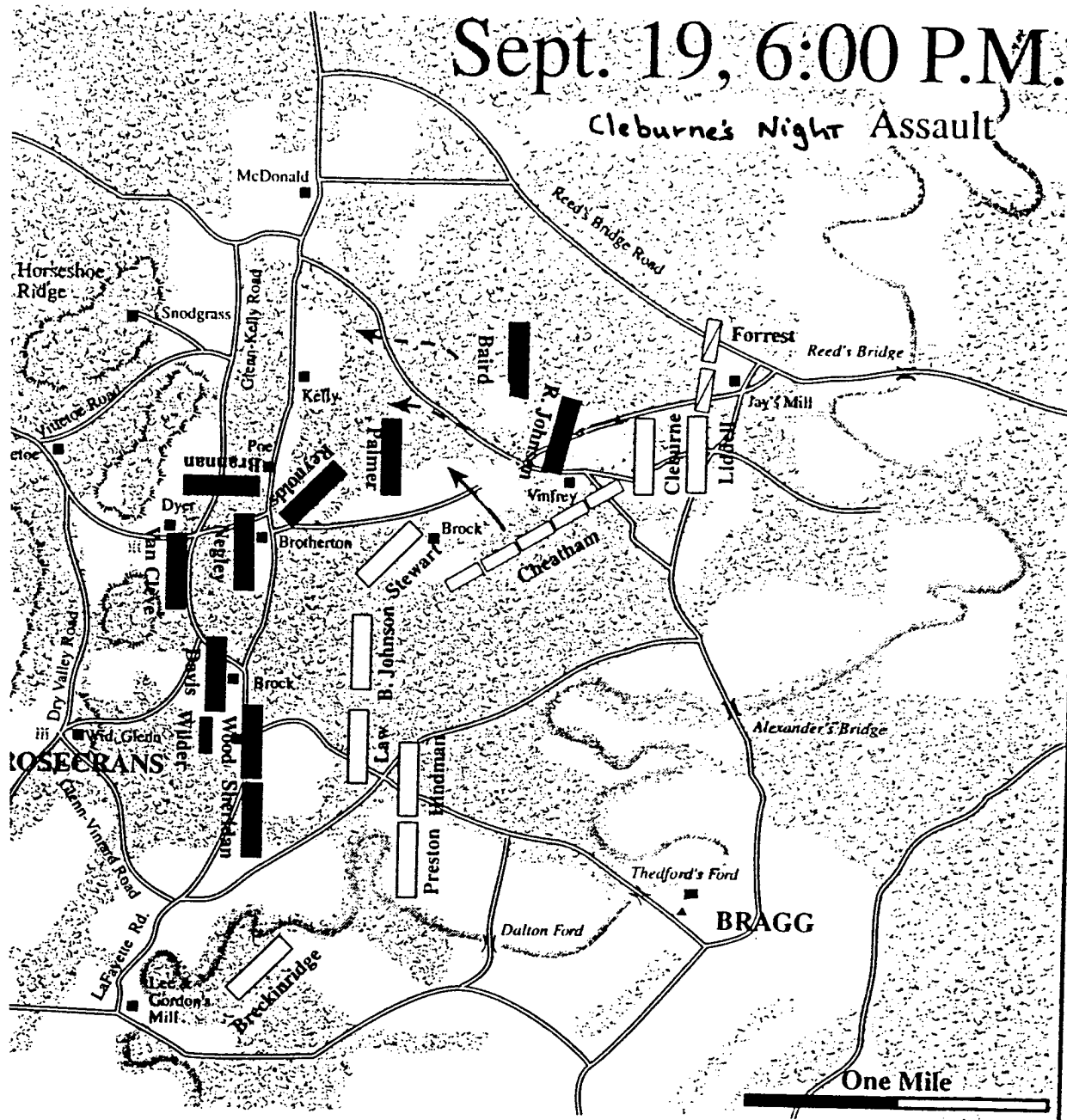


Figure 3. Cleburne's night assault. Source: Steven Woodworth, *A Deep Steady Thunder* (Abilene, TX: McWhiney Foundation Press, 1998), 57.

Lieutenant General Polk ordered the attack, neither Hill nor Bragg voiced objections to this unproductive night assault. Maintaining proper alignment while advancing through thick brush was a daunting task in daylight conditions. As fate would have it, two of the three brigades would attack through dense brush and forest.<sup>21</sup>

Cleburne's battle instructions were simple, but as Carl von Clausewitz wrote, "Everything is simple in war, but even the simplest thing is difficult." He instructed Polk and Deshler, the two flank brigades, to guide on Wood's center brigade and move as quickly as the terrain would allow. Wood's Brigade made first contact as it crossed through an open field. Wood's men pushed apart a worm rail fence that bordered their side of the field and stepped into the open. The looming darkness magnified the visible effects of weaponry. Soldiers on both sides were overwhelmed by the terrific bursts of musket and cannon. Cleburne, a veteran of many campaigns said, "For a half an hour the firing was the heaviest I had ever heard, accurate shooting was impossible. Each party aimed at the flashes of the other's guns, and few of the shots from either side took effect."<sup>22</sup>

In the dark, Wood's Brigade quickly turned into gaggles of men not knowing who was to their front or side. As the line of attack unraveled, elements of two regiments lagged behind and mistakenly shot their own comrades. The only bright spot in the ill-fated fight was Cleburne's chief of artillery massing guns at a decisive point. Major T. R. Hotchkiss, the division chief of artillery, deftly positioned three batteries behind Wood's brigade and followed the attack. When the brigade began to falter, the cannons were pushed forward within sixty yards of the Union line and unleashed. More than twenty

well-placed rounds pierced the Union breastworks, reviving the attack. The firing ceased early, however when Polk's Brigade veered left, masking Wood's right flank.<sup>23</sup>

Polk enjoyed the greatest success of the evening, largely because he capitalized on the mistakes of his enemy. Polk's men faced a Union brigade that had stacked arms, having already fought a heavy engagement earlier in the day. Not knowing a fresh brigade was at their front preparing for a night attack, the Union soldiers were tending to their wounded and gathering their dead. As Polk began the attack, the far right of his brigade overlapped his adversaries left, allowing his right flank to wheel left and take the Union flank. To make matters worse for the surprised Union brigade, a friendly brigade from an adjacent Union division mistakenly opened fire on them in the confusion of darkness. Adding insult to injury, Polk attacked the two Union brigades while they were attacking each other, sending them reeling backwards in a mob-like retreat.

Hill was an active participant in the chaos. He personally posted an artillery battery behind the Thirty-fifth Tennessee Regiment as it closed on the Union line. Under Hill's direction, the battery mistakenly fired on the rear of the regiment, startling the Confederate soldiers, and probably causing friendly casualties.<sup>24</sup> Coincidentally, the Union troops came to rest exactly where they had been ordered by Thomas a few hours earlier on the ridgeline in front of LaFayette Road. Polk suffered only sixty casualties, took fifty prisoners, and recaptured three artillery pieces lost earlier that day by Confederate artillerymen. Polk could not pursue the routed brigades because his left became entangled with Wood's right. Hill, the corps commander, was present to stop the commotion and intermingling.<sup>25</sup>

Deshler's Brigade, the left unit of Cleburne's Division, had problems from the start. His right lost contact with Wood's left almost immediately in the dark. As Wood wheeled his brigade northwest towards the field in front of him, Deshler's men continued due west. This divergence resulted in a five hundred-yard gap between the two brigades. The gap was inadvertently filled by men of Jackson's Brigade of Cheatham's Division that had engaged the enemy earlier that day and thought to be safely out of harm's way as Cleburne's Division attacked in front of them. Fired upon from the front, Jackson smartly ordered a hasty attack that drove the Union infantry back. Because Deshler had veered west away from the line of Union troops, his brigade would finish the day with minimal losses, albeit confused and disoriented.<sup>26</sup>

For good reasons, night engagements were seldom fought in the Civil War. Verbal orders and visual signals were the only instruments of command and control on the battlefield. It was nearly impossible to maintain linear discipline in darkness, and weapon accuracy was severely retarded. Radios and night vision devices would not be seen on the battlefield until World War II. Cleburne's Division escaped the throes of disaster because the Union forces were in the midst of a movement back to consolidate their lines. Thomas, in an effort to straighten out his lines, had ordered the two Union divisions to pick up and move back to a ridge in front of the LaFayette Road. Although Cleburne's Division succeeded in pushing the Federal forces back, he could not exploit his success in the darkness. Simply put, the Union divisions ended up about where Thomas wanted them. Under the cover of darkness they fortified their positions in anticipation of a morning attack.

According to Hill's official account of the night fight, it ended somewhere between 9 and 10 P.M. Hill stayed with Cleburne's Division, ensuring its "deranged" lines were straightened out and conferring with Cleburne and each of the brigade commanders individually. He left the battlefield at 11 P.M., headed for Thedford's Ford in hopes of receiving orders for the following day.<sup>27</sup> Hill's actions and decisions during Cleburne's night fight deserve careful analysis. As a division commander in the Army of Northern Virginia, Hill had been involved in a similar situation at Malvern Hill. At Malvern Hill, it was Hill who sharply opposed a follow-up pursuit of the Army of the Potomac on grounds that the battlefield had not been properly reconnoitered and that the disposition of the enemy was impossible to ascertain.<sup>28</sup> Hill and Cleburne had both been marching all day to get to the fight and had little knowledge of the enemy dispositions. A simple reconnaissance probably would have revealed that the Union forces were falling back towards the LaFayette Road. Had the night attack been an utter disaster, Hill certainly would have blamed Polk and Bragg for the reasons cited above, vowing no responsibility. Though the attack was not a catastrophe, it was a bad idea that Hill should have averted. By itching for a fight, he actively participated in an engagement that cost needless lives.

New in the rigors of corps command, Hill made a conscious decision to accompany Cleburne's division in his first real fight of the campaign. This in itself was a good choice. But a corps commander's responsibilities are broader than a division fight. He should have, as a minimum, sent staff couriers to Polk, Bragg, and Breckinridge to stay in the "information loop" that proved so elusive in Bragg's army. Knowing the next morning that the fighting would continue, a reasonable commander would have sought

guidance and instructions. Thus, Hill acted the part of a frustrated division commander. Frustrated in his attempts to take initiative, he reverted to what he knew, division-level close combat. He was remiss for prolonging the fight, "conferring with General Cleburne, and each of the brigade commanders individually."<sup>29</sup> He should have been thinking about his entire corps and how he would get the next day's orders.

Cleburne was certainly a capable division commander that Hill should have implicitly trusted. Bragg, who rarely gave out praise, called Cleburne "one of the best and truest officers to the cause."<sup>30</sup> Cleburne could have handled the details of the battle and ensured his divisional front was untangled for the next morning's fight. Thus, Hill appeared either unable or unwilling to accept the responsibilities of a corps command.

From an operational perspective, Bragg's piecemeal and sporadic attacks throughout 19 September prevented any chance of tactical surprise on the following day. The fighting ended that evening with the Army of Tennessee stretched along a three-mile line of defense from near Lee and Gordon's Mill in the south, north to Reed's Bridge. Earlier in the evening, Bragg sent a message to Polk via courier, calling another council of war that evening with all of his corps commanders.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>*The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*, 70 volumes (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1880-1901), series I, vol. 30, part 4, 636. (Hereafter cited as *O.R.*); Thomas Connelly, *Autumn of Glory: The Army of Tennessee, 1862-1865* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1971), 185. (Hereafter cited as *Autumn of Glory*.)

<sup>2</sup>Daniel Harvey Hill, "Chickamauga: The Great Battle of the West," *Battles and Leaders of the Civil War*, 3 volumes (New York: The Century Company, 1888), vol. 3 part 2, 645. (Hereafter cited as *Battles and Leaders*).

<sup>3</sup>*O.R.*, vol. 30, part 2, 139; *O.R.*, vol. 30, part 1, 486; Hill, *Battles and Leaders*, vol. 3, 645.

<sup>4</sup>Connelly, *Autumn of Glory*, 190.

<sup>5</sup>Hill, *Battles and Leaders*, vol. 3, 644.

<sup>6</sup>Connelly, *Autumn of Glory*, 186-187; Peter Cozzens, *This Terrible Sound*, (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1992), 81; *O.R.*, vol. 30, part 4, 530.

<sup>7</sup>*O.R.*, vol. 30, part 2, 30.

<sup>8</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup>Cozzens, *This Terrible Sound*, 84; Connelly, *Autumn of Glory*, 187; Steven E. Woodworth, *Six Armies in Tennessee: The Chattanooga Campaigns* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1998), 75-76. (Hereafter cited as *Six Armies*.)

<sup>10</sup>Hill, *Battles and Leaders*, vol. 3, 643.

<sup>11</sup>*Ibid.*, 646.

<sup>12</sup>Connelly, *Autumn of Glory*, 190-192; Cozzens, *This Terrible Sound*, 89; *O.R.*, vol. 30, part 2, 169.

<sup>13</sup>Woodworth, *Six Armies*, 80; Connelly, *Autumn of Glory*, 193-94.

<sup>14</sup>*O.R.*, vol. 30, part 2, 657.

<sup>15</sup>Connelly, *Autumn of Glory*, 194-196.

<sup>16</sup>*Ibid.*, 194-198.

<sup>17</sup>*O.R.*, vol. 30, part 2, 140.

<sup>18</sup>*Ibid.*, 140, 197, 203.

<sup>19</sup>Cozzens, *This Terrible Sound*, 170.

<sup>20</sup>Cozzens, *This Terrible Sound*, 170; Connelly, *Autumn of Glory*, 207.

<sup>21</sup>Cozzens, *This Terrible Sound*, 263-265.

<sup>22</sup>*O.R.*, vol. 30, part 2, 154, 565.

<sup>23</sup>*Ibid.*, 170, 174.

<sup>24</sup>*Ibid.*, 176, 182.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., 176-183.

<sup>26</sup>Cozzens, *This Terrible Sound*, 274-275.

<sup>27</sup>*O.R.*, vol. 30, part 2, 140.

<sup>28</sup>Hal Bridges, *Lee's Maverick General: Daniel Harvey Hill*, (New York, NY: McGraw-Hill, 1961), 77.

<sup>29</sup>*O.R.*, vol. 30, part 2, 140.

<sup>30</sup>Cozzens, *This Terrible Sound*, 266.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid., 265.



## CHAPTER 4

### THE HAZARDOUS EXPERIMENT

In the middle of the fiercest two-day battle of the Civil War, Bragg decided upon a total reorganization of his army. Hill would later refer to this as that "hazardous experiment, a change of organization in the face of the enemy."<sup>1</sup> About 9:00 P.M., Polk arrived at Thedford's Ford, where he first heard Bragg's attack plan. Earlier that evening, Bragg had learned that Longstreet had safely arrived at Ringgold and would soon be present for duty. Now, Bragg explained to Polk, he was dividing the army into two grand wings. Polk was to keep his right wing, where Cheatham's Division, Walker's Reserve Corps, and Hill's Corps were now assembling. On the left, Longstreet would command Buckner's Corps, Hindman's Division of Polk's Corps, Bushrod Johnson's provisional division, and Longstreet's own corps commanded by John B. Hood.<sup>2</sup> Bragg's plan of attack for the next morning was straightforward: the Army of the Cumberland was to be driven southward, towards McLemore's Cove and away from the routes to Chattanooga by either Rossville or McFarland's Gaps.

Bragg planned to strike first with his right wing against Rosecrans' northern flank, overlap it, crush it and then roll the Union army southward. To achieve this, the Army of Tennessee's divisions would attack one after the other, in order, beginning on the right, so that Confederate momentum would sweep along the battle line from right to left, destroying Rosecrans' divisions and any chance of escaping to Chattanooga. The idea was such that as each successive Federal unit began to struggle against Confederate pressure on its northern flank, it would be hammered from the front and knocked out of line.<sup>3</sup>

Dividing his army into two wings made sense; Bragg was in no state of mind to control five infantry corps, two cavalry corps, and one infantry division. Since Polk had been in charge of the right wing most of the day prior, it was logical that he remained in charge. Hill, the junior lieutenant general, was relegated to work for a general of the same rank, Polk. Putting Longstreet in charge of the left wing of Bragg's army before he even arrived on the battlefield was a dangerous proposition. Once again, Bragg devised a plan that looked good on paper, but would prove next to impossible to execute.

Longstreet's principal division commander, Hood, had been on the field all day on 19 September and knew the field and the situation. A major change in command structure should have been announced and coordinated before late evening on 19 September. Had Bragg ensured all of his corps commanders were present that evening, he could have clearly communicated his intent, thereby eliminating the confusion that ensued.

Though tardy, Hill was aware of his need for orders for the next day. At 11 P.M., he wearily made the nearly five-mile ride from William Jay's Sawmill to Thedford's Ford where orders of the day stated Bragg's headquarters would be located. Accompanied by his aide, Lieutenant Reid, and his engineer, Captain Coleman, he guided his horse along the dusty roads that meandered beside Chickamauga Creek, crossing the frigid, chest-deep water several times. He had been in the saddle since sunrise, riding all the way from the extreme left to the extreme right of Confederate lines. The fatigue of riding all day and fighting weighed heavily on his frail body.<sup>4</sup>

The moon was bright, but the temperature dipped to near freezing. The air was filled with smoke from the day's battle and thousands of campfires. As the smoke and mist from Chickamauga Creek mixed, it created a thick haze that greatly reduced

visibility and hindered navigation. One of Hill's staff officers reported that visibility was less than ten yards.<sup>5</sup> Hill lost his way and did not get to Thedford's Ford until sometime after 11 P.M. The timing of Hill's actions on that fateful night is not clear. In his official report, Hill stated that he did not leave the battlefield until 11 P.M. Then, in response to a query from Polk, Hill stated that he was at Thedford's Ford from 11 P.M. until 3 A.M.<sup>6</sup> Whenever Hill did arrive at Thedford's Ford, he could not find Bragg. Possibly, Hill never reached his destination, but mistook another of the numerous river crossings for it. Yet he and several of his staff officers later testified he was at Thedford's Ford. Surely Hill was familiar with the place since earlier that day he met with Bragg at his headquarters to discuss his proposition of attacking the Federal right with Breckinridge's division.<sup>7</sup> He had also crossed the creek at Thedford's Ford earlier in the day with Cleburne's Division.

The last information Hill had about Breckinridge was that he had been ordered to replace Hindman at Lee and Gordon's Mill. Hill did not know that Bragg had ordered Breckinridge to vacate his position at Lee and Gordon's Mill and move to the right of the army. Hill learned of Breckinridge's movement from straggling soldiers along the road instead of the normal chain of command. In reaction to this, he sent Lieutenant Reid to find Breckinridge and guide him to a position on the right of Cleburne. Hill and Captain Coleman continued their quest to locate Bragg.<sup>8</sup>

The duty of informing Hill of the daylight attack fell to Polk. While returning from Bragg's headquarters at Thedford's Ford, Polk ran into Hill's chief of staff, Lieutenant Colonel Archer Anderson. Polk verbally informed him of the new organizational structure of the Army of Tennessee and gave Anderson a verbal message

to deliver to Hill, "Tell General Hill I wish to see him tonight at my quarters as the fate of the country may depend upon the attack tomorrow."<sup>9</sup> Polk went on to say that he would post a courier at Alexander's Bridge to guide Hill to his headquarters.<sup>10</sup>

Sometime after arriving at Thedford's Ford, around midnight, Hill was met by Lieutenant Colonel Anderson. Anderson told Hill that he had happened upon Polk on the road and that Polk was in charge of the Right Wing, which included Hill's Corps. Sometime later, Hill was met by Lieutenant Reid with startling information regarding the status of Breckinridge. Reid had found Polk and Breckinridge together at Polk's headquarters. Reid had informed Breckinridge of his orders to escort that general's division into the line on Cleburne's right. Breckinridge replied that his men were much exhausted and that he would prefer to let them rest before continuing the march to Cleburne's right. He promised that he would have them in place by morning. Reid responded that he was under orders from Hill. Breckinridge appealed to Polk, who countermanded Hill's order, giving Breckinridge permission to rest his men so long as he promised to have them in position by daylight. Polk then invited Breckinridge to bivouac at his headquarters.<sup>11</sup> Hill, upon hearing this, told Lieutenant Reid to rest a while and return to Breckinridge at 2:00 A.M. to complete his task of escorting him to Cleburne's right.

At this point Hill made a gross error in judgment. Polk's headquarters at Alexander's Bridge was downstream, nearly three miles north of Thedford's Ford by the winding roads. Rather than riding to find Polk, Hill elected to take a three-hour nap.<sup>12</sup> There is little doubt that Hill was upset when he discovered third-hand he was relegated to work for Polk. Add to this Lieutenant Reid's account that Polk had authorized

Breckinridge to halt the march of his tired men until morning, and Hill's ego was badly bruised. He had barely, even accidentally, learned that Polk had already usurped his authority by allowing Breckinridge to stop for the night. Miffed by his sudden change in status, Hill decided to take a nap. If he was too exhausted to continue, Hill should have sent a courier to Polk's headquarters, requesting written instructions for the next day.

Meanwhile, after his conversations with Breckinridge and Hill's staff officers, Polk returned to his headquarters near Alexander's Bridge, on the east bank of Chickamauga Creek, and issued written orders for the next day. The orders directed Hill to attack the enemy with his corps at daylight the next morning. Cheatham, on Hill's left, was to "make a simultaneous attack," and Walker's Corps was designated as the reserve. Cheatham's orders were sent and delivered via courier, and Walker received his personally at Polk's headquarters.<sup>13</sup>

Around midnight, Colonel Thomas M. Jack, the assistant adjutant general of Polk's Corps, handed a sealed envelope to John H. Fisher, an enlisted member of the Orleans Light Horse Troop attached to Polk's command. He ordered him to deliver it to Hill who was thought to be at Thedford's Ford.<sup>14</sup> Over 49,000 Confederate soldiers were encamped in the valley. Somewhere among this maze of troops were Lieutenant General Hill and some of his staff officers. Each of the small campfires illuminated a small group of Confederate soldiers hunkered together against the brisk night.<sup>15</sup>

Fisher was not informed of the importance of the message he carried. He had been given no verbal orders to convey upon finding Hill. However, the orders he carried while wandering along the creek in his futile search contained one of the most urgent and important messages of the entire battle. Unbeknownst to him, his success or failure in

delivering the message would have a tremendous impact on the outcome of this battle. Fisher later testified that he spent four hours searching and inquiring for Hill, but he never stated that he went to Thedford's Ford. If Fisher actually found Thedford's Ford, he never found Hill. He later reported that, "After going in every direction and inquiring of all the soldiers I met of his and other commands I returned to headquarters, after a search of about four hours, unable to find General Hill."<sup>16</sup> Satisfied his efforts were sufficient; Fisher returned to Polk's headquarters some time after 4:00 A.M. and warmed himself by a fire. Instructed by a civilian clerk Mr. McReady, not to disturb his Colonel Jack, Fisher got a few hours of sleep. He failed to inform anyone of his inability to find Hill. The fateful order remained sealed in its envelope, and with it, the prospect of a successful daylight attack.<sup>17</sup>

Without directions or a competent guide, Polk's headquarters the evening of 19 September would be difficult to locate. To reach his headquarters from the battle area, one had to cross Alexander's Bridge, continue down the road for one-half to three quarters of a mile, then turn down a side road for about one hundred yards into the woods. Polk, in an effort to alleviate any confusion, posted two guides that night. One guide was posted at the bridge and the other at the intersection of the main road and side road. Although both guides were initially instructed to remain at their posts "for an hour or so" they withdrew around 2 a.m.<sup>18</sup>

At about 3 A.M., Hill awoke from his nap and set out from Thedford's Ford with Anderson, Coleman, and Morrison to find Polk's headquarters at Alexander's Bridge. When within two hundred yards of the bridge, Hill sent Captain Coleman ahead to search about in the foggy darkness for the guides. When Coleman reported he could find no

one, Hill decided to ride to his battle line, ordering Lieutenant Morrison to locate Polk and inform him of this. What Morrison did afterward seems lost to the record. There is no indication that he found Polk in time to influence the course of events.<sup>19</sup>

This incredibly confusing night is a classic example of the lack of cooperation within the Army of Tennessee's high command. All "good ideas" have a "no later than" cutoff time when they must be enacted in order to be effective. Though Bragg's change in command structure may have made sense in other circumstances, it was the wrong thing to do at the wrong time. Bragg should have left Hill and Polk in charge until he had reasonable assurance that command arrangements were coordinated effectively. Changes in the command and control structure should be properly coordinated. Bragg should have been the one to inform Hill that he had a new boss, either by courier or face-to-face. This simple coordination step would certainly have alleviated much of the confusion and misunderstandings that occurred on that fateful evening.

Polk was most derelict in this comedy of errors. It is incredible that he visited with Breckinridge without informing him that a daylight attack was planned.<sup>20</sup> On a night of such reduced visibility, Polk should have realized that finding Hill would be arduous. For the sake of redundancy, two couriers should have been sent to locate Hill. When Polk saw Lieutenant Colonel Anderson, he should have quickly scribbled some general orders and then followed up with more formal written instructions. At the least, he should have given verbal orders for the daylight attack when he spoke with Colonel Anderson. Polk's staff supervision was poor. He failed to instill the importance of the next day's attack in his own assistant adjutant general, who went to sleep without

developing a redundant plan to get Hill his orders. Polk's lackadaisical attitude and lack of initiative would cost precious daylight and many lives on 20 September.

As in any major mishap, there were a series of uncorrected mistakes and contributing factors to that fateful night. Hill's lack of initiative was certainly a contributing factor. Upon learning he was placed under Polk, Hill apparently sulked, instead of making the most out of a bad situation. He let his personal pride get in the way of mission accomplishment. He should have been more diligent in finding Polk's and Bragg's headquarters. He should have personally sought Polk instead of just sending one of his staff. Had he been thinking like a corps commander in the early evening, he would have left Cleburne, a competent commander, and sought instructions from Bragg. At the least, he should have sent couriers to Bragg and Polk, to seek and pass updates and information.

Hill reached his front just after daylight. Hill found his division commanders Cleburne and Breckinridge and conferred with them behind Cleburne's line. Despite Breckinridge's promised arrival at the battle line before daylight, he was just then in the process of placing his men into line on the right of Cleburne's Division. At about 6:00 A.M., while the three officers were talking and sharing breakfast around a campfire, a young captain from Polk's staff J. Frank Wheless arrived bearing a message that Polk had hastily written at 5:30 A.M. that same morning. General Hill extended his hand to receive the message and was promptly informed, "These orders are for Generals Breckinridge and Cleburne." Wheless then handed the orders to Hill's subordinates. While the two division commanders read their orders, Captain Wheless turned to Hill and commented, "In explanation, General, why these orders were not sent through you, it is



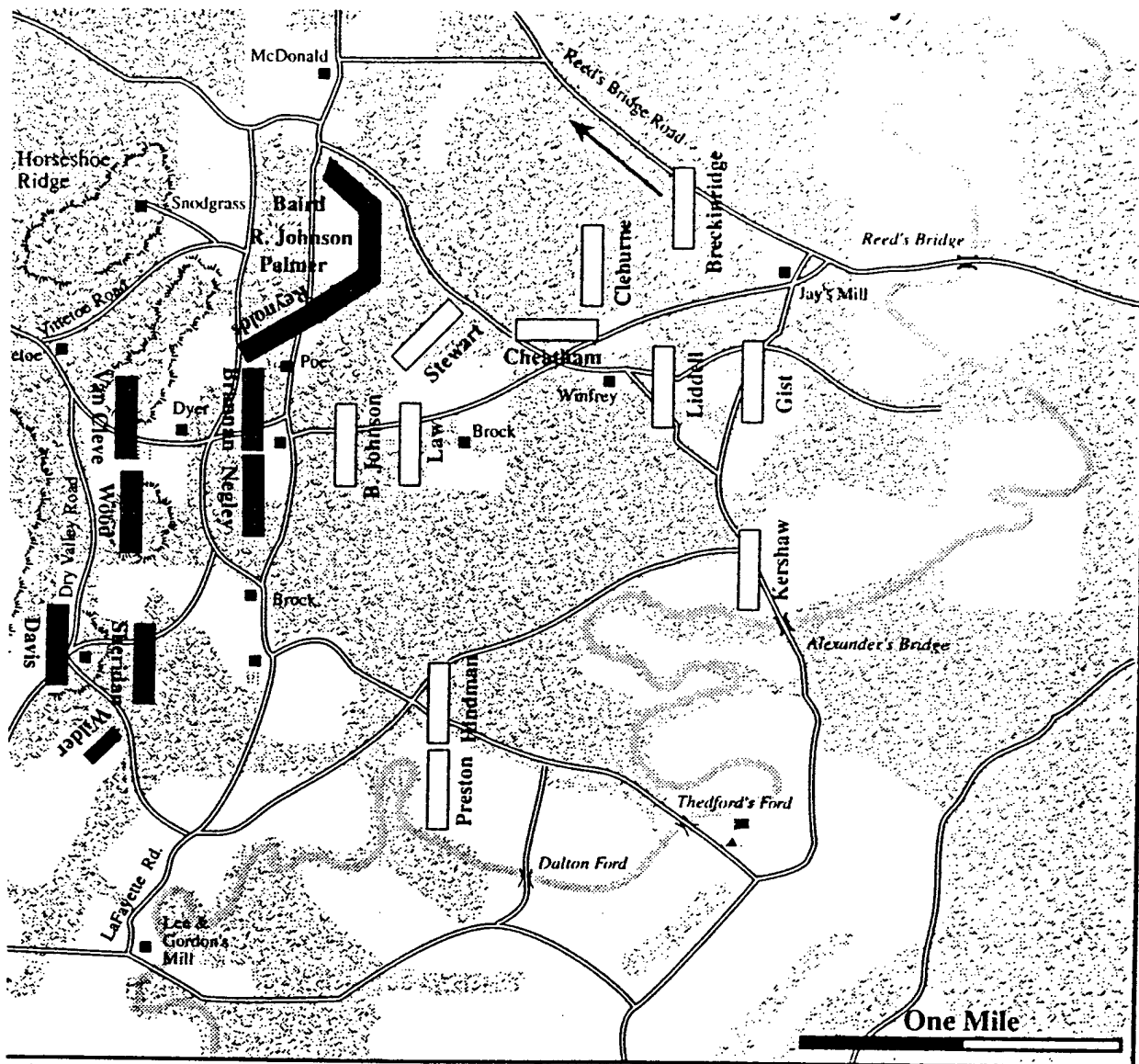


Figure 4. Dispositions for the "Day Dawn" attack. Source: Woodworth, *A Deep Steady Thunder*, 65.

proper to say that General Polk has had a staff officer hunting for you since 12 o'clock last night."<sup>21</sup> Cleburne perused the message and handed it to Hill. The orders that Captain Wheless delivered directed an attack once the troops were in position:<sup>22</sup>

Major General Cleburne  
Major General Breckinridge:  
Generals: The Lieutenant-General commanding, having sought in vain for Lieutenant General Hill, gives you directly the following orders:  
Move upon and attack the enemy so soon as you are in position.  
Major-General Cheatham, on our left, has been ordered to make a simultaneous attack.<sup>23</sup>

Since both divisions were distributing rations and the order said nothing about a daylight attack, Hill determined it would be an hour before his troops were ready. To Hill's thinking, Polk's entire wing was not ready. He had found that Cheatham's right was perpendicular to Cleburne, making a simultaneous advance impossible.<sup>24</sup> Not convinced that Polk had a good understanding of the situation, Hill sat down and quickly jotted him a message, while Wheless impatiently waited:

General: I could find no courier at Alexander's Bridge, and therefore could not find you. My divisions are getting their rations and will not be ready to move for an hour or more. Breckinridge's wagons seem to have got lost between Thedford's Ford and this place. It will be well for you to examine the line from one end to the other before starting. Brigadier-General Jackson is running from east to west. My line is from north to south. General Cleburne reports that Yankees were felling trees all night, and consequently now occupy a position too strong to be taken by assault. What shall be done when this point is reached?<sup>25</sup>

Soon after Wheless departed with Hill's message, Polk arrived. And according to Hill, he made no objection to the delay. Prior to his arrival, Polk had received Hill's message and sent a quick note to Bragg explaining the tardiness of the attack:

I am this instant in receipt of my first communication with General Hill who informs me that he will not be ready to move for an hour or more, because his troops are receiving rations and because his wagons were lost last night. The attack will be made as soon as he is prepared for it.<sup>26</sup>

Nothing in this message mentioned Hill's concern about misalignment of troops or the breastworks opposite Cleburne. Polk was simply covering his rear. He did not want Bragg to know that his lines were not straight. A few minutes after Polk departed, Bragg angrily rode up to Hill's position and inquired why the daylight attack had not occurred yet:

Bragg rode up about 8:00 A.M. and inquired of me why I had not begun the attack at daylight. I told him I was hearing for the first time that such an order had been issued and had not known whether we were to be the assailants or the assailed. He said angrily "I found Polk after sunrise sitting down reading a newspaper at Alexander's Bridge, two miles from the line of battle, where he ought to have been fighting." However, the essential preparations for battle had not been made up to this hour and, in fact, could not be made without the presence of the commander-in-chief. The position of the enemy had not been reconnoitered, our line of battle had not been adjusted, and part of it was at right angles with the rest; there was no cavalry on our flanks, and no order had fixed the strength and position of the reserves. My corps had been aligned north and south, to be parallel to the position of the enemy. Cheatham's division was at right angles to my line, and when adjusted was found to be exactly behind Stewart's and had therefore, to be taken out after the battle was begun, and placed in reserve. Kershaw's brigade of Longstreet's corps was also out of place and was put in reserve.<sup>27</sup>

By about 9:30 A.M. Hill readied his divisions for the attack. General Forrest's Cavalry Corps was enlisted to protect Breckinridge's right flank. In order to accomplish this, Armstrong's Division dismounted and aligned itself next to Brigadier General Adams' Brigade. Pegram's Cavalry Division was placed in reserve. Earlier that morning, Hill, Forrest, and Adams, a brigade commander of Breckinridge's division, reconnoitered the Union flank with an amazing discovery. Breckinridge's division extended past the Union breastworks with only a thin line of skirmishers supporting the flank.<sup>28</sup>



Figure 5. Polk's mid-morning assault. Source: Woodworth, *A Deep Steady Thunder*, 67.

### The Attack

Breckinridge commenced the attack with his three brigades abreast. As the advance began, Hill dispatched a courier to Polk reminding him that he was attacking with a single line, without a reserve. Polk had already begun moving Walker to a position behind Cleburne. In response to Hill's note, Polk ordered Walker to continue north until he was in supporting distance of Breckinridge's Division.<sup>29</sup> Breckinridge's division was aligned from right to left with the brigades of Adams, Stovall and Helm. As they stepped forward, they immediately obliques to the right. Adams and Stovall met little resistance and were quickly astride the LaFayette Road. Helm had a more difficult route to follow. His attack route placed his left flank squarely on the northern corner of the horseshoe-shaped Union breastworks. His left flank scraped the northern edge of Union breastworks causing his brigade to receive heavy fire. Helm was mortally wounded and his brigade forced to withdraw. Breckinridge suggested to Hill that his two successful brigades wheel southward and begin to crush the enemy flanks, just as Bragg had envisioned. Hill quickly concurred with the idea. Their initial success was terrific, but just as terrific were the efforts of Union forces in reacting to the flank attack. The initial success of the two-brigade attack was quickly reversed. Adams was injured and subsequently captured.<sup>30</sup>

Cleburne's Irish luck was not with his division during the initial attack. Arrayed in the same manner as the night before with Polk on the right, Wood in the center, and Deshler on the left, his line went forward. Wood's brigade was intermingled with Stewart's division, who made up the extreme right of Longstreet's Left Wing. In order to get his newly arrived Army of Northern Virginia troops on the front line, Longstreet

shifted Stewart to the right in the early morning. Consequently, Stewart's Division was entirely in front of Deshler's Brigade, causing Deshler to be pulled out of action and relegated to reserve status.

### The Gap

Brigadier General Lucius Polk's brigade was supposed to dress on Helm, but as Helm veered right with the rest of Breckinridge's division, contact was lost. Polk ran head-on into the prepared defenses that he had heard being built the previous evening. Wood, in turn, lost contact with Polk on his right. One of his regiments made good progress to the LaFayette Road, but was then handily repulsed. Cleburne's attack quickly disintegrated into separate, uncoordinated brigade and regimental actions. As the gap between Wood and Polk widened, Cleburne ordered Deshler to fill it. Deshler was killed while moving forward to his front line of soldiers.<sup>31</sup>

Helm's repulse created a large gap between the two divisions. Earlier, somebody had mentioned to Hill that Brigadier General States Rights Gist of Walker's Corps had just arrived on the battlefield with his brigade from Rome, Georgia. Hill had heard of Gist's brigade and sent a staff officer to bring him forward to fill the gap. Gist had arrived at Catoosa Station on the afternoon of the nineteenth. Before departing Catoosa for the battlefield, he was ordered to escort an ordnance train. The ordnance train was not ready to move until 10:00 P.M., and it was sunrise before Gist reached Alexander's Bridge. Needless to say, Gist and his men were fatigued from the all night march. Any of the other brigades behind Walker would have been a better choice for the task of filling the gap left by Helm.

About that same time, 11:00 A.M., Polk and Walker arrived to meet Hill. Hill was much surprised to learn that three brigades had arrived though he had asked for only one. Walker had coincidentally arrived behind Hill just as Gist was marching to catch up with Walker. Thus, Walker placed Gist in charge of his division since he now commanded a corps. Hill repeated his request for a single brigade, specifically Gist's. Walker explained that Gist had just arrived and that it would take time to dispatch him, but that any of the three brigades behind him were prepared to fight. Hill repeated his by-name request for Gist, and Walker relented. Gist's Division was sent to fill the gap vacated by Helm. He sadly fell into the same trap as Helm and yet another five hundred yard wide gap existed between Gist and Cleburne.<sup>32</sup>

The remainder of Walker's reserve was parceled to Cleburne and Breckinridge's right. Walker, as one would expect, felt cheated out of a command. His forthright comments show the frustration he felt:

I owe it to myself and to the gallant command under me to state that when I reported to General Hill, had he permitted me to fight my Reserve Corps according to my own judgement, and had not disintegrated it, as he did, by sending it in by detachments, I would have formed my five batteries on the left flank of the enemy, toward the Chattanooga road, and opened fire on the enemy's flanks.<sup>33</sup>

When Walker arrived with his Reserve Corps, Hill stubbornly held to his original design to fill the gap. He could have spared countless lives by immediately dispatching Walker's corps to Breckinridge and exploiting the Union left flank. Instead, he piecemealed the effort. Similar to his actions at McLemore's Cove, Hill was slow to act in the face of opportunity. Perhaps this was an attempt to increase his span of control and influence on the battle. By dismantling Walker's Corps into brigade-and division-sized

fragments, Hill could keep his command of the extreme right and thereby take credit for any success. Of all the mistakes Hill made during this campaign, this was his worst and most egregious.

As the gap between Cleburne and Breckinridge widened, Hill personally requested that Polk provide him with at least another brigade to fill it before he renewed the attack. Hill requested that he be allowed to make a second attack, after the gap was filled. Polk consented and gave Hill tactical command of Walker's Reserve Corps and the right of the wing. Brigadier General Jackson's brigade of Cheatham's Division was selected for the daunting task of filling the gap.<sup>34</sup> By Hill's account, Jackson never accomplished the task:

General J. K. Jackson's was sent for that purpose, but unfortunately took its position too far in rear to engage the attention of the enemy in front, and every advance on our right during the remainder of the day was met with flank and cross fire from that quarter.<sup>35</sup>

Precious daylight was burned while Hill cautiously waited for Jackson to get his troops into position. Hill's fascination with the gap between his divisions caused him to miss the broader picture. A small fixing force could have kept the threat of the gap in check while a broader swing to the right, away from the effective fires of the Union forces in the gap would have allowed the Confederate attackers to maneuver safely around it.

Although the initial attack of the Right Wing seemed fruitless at first, it did cause the opposing Union corps commander General Thomas to frantically request reinforcements from the Federal right. As the Union troops streamed north in response, there was much confusion and a division-sized gap was created. When Longstreet's Left Wing swung into motion, his troops were configured perfectly to exploit the gap, and



Confederate troops charged deep into the Union rear, nearly capturing Rosecrans in the process.<sup>36</sup>

At 3:30 P.M., General Polk ordered another attack. Things began to look promising again for the Right Wing of the Army of Tennessee. The remainder of Cheatham's division that had earlier been taken out of line by Polk and put in reserve was attached to Breckinridge. Breckinridge placed Cheatham on his left with instructions to make a connection with Cleburne, thereby closing the gap. Finally, Polk's right wing had gotten all of its brigades coordinated and synchronized. Forrest's cavalry seized the LaFayette Road, Breckinridge swept southward behind the breastworks, and Cleburne succeeded in breaching the breastworks to his front. It must be noted, however, that the success of the attack was due largely to the fact that Union troops were withdrawing from their positions towards Rossville and Chattanooga. Longstreet's wing had swung north while Breckinridge swung south. As the sun began to set, it became apparent that fratricide was looming. Hill could see men from Longstreet's wing closing on his front lines. He smartly halted the advance and threw out skirmishers.

After the two bloodiest days of the Civil War, the Army of Tennessee finally succeeded in driving the Army of the Cumberland from the battlefield. Though the day had begun with much confusion and disarray in the right wing, it ended in a gloriously synchronized assault. In Hill's words:

Never, perhaps, was there a battle in which the troops were so little mixed up and in which the organization was so little disturbed. The Corps was ready to march or fight at dawn in the morning, with thinned ranks, it is true, but with buoyant and exultant spirits. The morning, however, was spent burying the dead and gathering up arms.<sup>37</sup>

Outwardly critical of Bragg's decision not to pursue the Union forces and reverse its occupation of Chattanooga, Hill remarked in his postwar account of the battle, "Whatever blunders each of us in authority committed before the battles of the nineteenth and twentieth, and during their progress, the great blunder of all was that of not pursuing the enemy on the twenty-first."<sup>38</sup>

### Analysis

Hill's performance from 11 September to the conclusion of the battle on 20 September was at best, mediocre. His tactical decisions on the battlefield were lacking and in stark contrast to his feats as a division commander in the Army of Northern Virginia. As a division commander, much of his time after fighting was spent critiquing decisions of his superior officers. Hill got his first opportunity at Chickamauga to show his mettle as a strategic leader. As the fissure between his views and Bragg's widened, Hill became more distraught. In a last-ditch attempt to save his Southern honor, Hill dismantled Walker's Corps to maintain control of the extreme right wing. None of the mistakes he made warranted dismissal; many corps commanders performed worse in their first campaign. Organizational leadership involves dealing with more complexity and uncertainty than direct leadership. According to Army Field Manual 22-100, "Organizational leaders are far more likely than direct leaders to be required to make decisions with incomplete information . . . To determine the right course of action. . . . They think far into the future."<sup>39</sup> Not comfortable in the complex realm of corps command, he faltered in the most difficult situations. The transition from division to corps commander proved a difficult step for many Confederates generals. Hill would not

be given another opportunity to prove himself a capable corps commander. Bragg relieved Hill of command for his failure to perform at Chickamauga.

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<sup>1</sup>Daniel Harvey Hill, "Chickamauga: The Great Battle of the West," *Battles and Leaders of the Civil War*, 3 volumes (New York, NY: The Century Company, 1888), vol. 3, part 2: 652. (Hereafter cited as *Battles and Leaders*.)

<sup>2</sup>Peter Cozzens, *This Terrible Sound* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1992), 300; Thomas Connelly, *Autumn of Glory: The Army of Tennessee, 1862-1865* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1971), 208. (Hereafter cited as *Autumn of Glory*.)

<sup>3</sup>*The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1880-1901), Series I, vol. 30, part 2, 33. (Hereafter cited as *O.R.*); Steven E. Woodworth, *Six Armies in Tennessee: The Chattanooga Campaigns* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1998), 103. (Hereafter cited as *Six Armies*.); Connelly, *Autumn of Glory*, 210.

<sup>4</sup>Cozzens, *This Terrible Sound*, 302.

<sup>5</sup>Hal Bridges, *Lee's Maverick General: Daniel Harvey Hill* (New York, NY: McGraw-Hill, 1961), 208. (Hereafter cited as *Lee's Maverick General*.)

<sup>6</sup>*O.R.*, vol. 30, part 2, 64, 140.

<sup>7</sup>Connelly, *Autumn of Glory*, 212; Cozzens, *This Terrible Sound*, 302.

<sup>8</sup>See *O.R.*, vol. 30, part 2, 140; and Bridges, *Lee's Maverick General*, 208.

<sup>9</sup>Bridges, *Lee's Maverick General*, 209.

<sup>10</sup>*O.R.*, vol. 30, part 2, 140; Hill, *Battles and Leaders*, vol. 3, 653; Bridges, *Lee's Maverick General*, 209.

<sup>11</sup>William N. Polk, "The battle of Chickamauga," *Southern Historical Society Papers*, (1882) vol.10: 16.

<sup>12</sup>Bridges, *Lee's Maverick General*, 209.

<sup>13</sup>Cozzens, *This Terrible Sound*, 303.

<sup>14</sup>*O.R.*, vol. 30, part 2, 57.

<sup>15</sup>Hill, *Battles and Leaders*, vol. 3, 652, 654; Cozzens, *This Terrible Sound*, 303-305; James Longstreet, *From Manassas to Appomattox* (Philadelphia, PA: 1896), 438.

<sup>16</sup>*O.R.*, vol. 30, part 2, 57.

<sup>17</sup>*Ibid.*, 57-58.

<sup>18</sup>Cozzens, *This Terrible Sound*, 304; Connelly, *Autumn of Glory*, 215; Bridges, *Lee's Maverick General*, 211.

<sup>19</sup>*O.R.*, vol. 30, part 2, 64, 140-141; Bridges, *Lee's Maverick General*, 211.

<sup>20</sup>Connelly, *Autumn of Glory*, 215.

<sup>21</sup>*O.R.*, vol. 30, part 2, 61-62.

<sup>22</sup>Cozzens, *This Terrible Sound*, 306.

<sup>23</sup>*O.R.*, vol. 30, part 2, 52.

<sup>24</sup>Cozzens, *This Terrible Sound*, 307.

<sup>25</sup>*O.R.*, vol. 30, part 2, 53.

<sup>26</sup>*Ibid.*, 53.

<sup>27</sup>Hill, *Battles and Leaders*, vol. 3, 653.

<sup>28</sup>*O.R.*, vol. 30, part 2, 141; Hill, *Battles and Leaders*, vol. 3, 655.

<sup>29</sup>*O.R.*, vol. 30, part 2, 141; Cozzens, *This Terrible Sound*, 350-351.

<sup>30</sup>*O.R.*, vol. 30, part 2, 141-142.

<sup>31</sup>*O.R.*, vol. 30, part 2, 156, 188-189; Cozzens, *This Terrible Sound*, 348-349.

<sup>32</sup>Cozzens, *This Terrible Sound*, 350; *O.R.*, vol. 30, part 2, 245.

<sup>33</sup>Russell Brown, *To the Manner Born: The life of General William H. T. Walker* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1994), 179-180.

<sup>34</sup>*O.R.*, vol. 30, part 2, 144.

<sup>35</sup>Hill, *Battles and Leaders*, vol. 3, 657.

<sup>36</sup>*O.R.*, vol. 30, part 2, 143-144.

<sup>37</sup>*Ibid.*, 145.

<sup>38</sup>Hill, *Battles and Leaders*, vol. 3, 662.

<sup>39</sup>Headquarters, Department of The Army, FM 22-100, *Army Leadership: Be, Know, Do* (Washington, DC: HQ, Department of Army, August, 1999), 6-15.

## CHAPTER 5

### CONCLUSION

#### Dissension in the High Command

Bragg's failure to immediately pursue the routed Federal army was a monumental source of conflict among his officers. The failure to follow tactical victory had nullified any opportunity to retake Chattanooga and gain a strategic victory. To be sure, Bragg's subordinates were not happy as the Confederate army crept forward toward Chattanooga in no hurry to exploit its hard-won tactical victory at Chickamauga. By late September, Bragg's army was experiencing an unprecedented internal crisis. While Bragg was planning to rid his army of commanders he thought incompetent, many of these same officers were plotting his removal.<sup>1</sup>

On 22 September, Bragg confided to his wife in a letter that he intended to take disciplinary actions against Hindman for his failure at McLemore's Cove and against Polk for his failure to attack at daylight on the twentieth.<sup>2</sup> The same day he sent a terse note to Polk demanding an explanation for the slowness of the Right Wing's attack on 20 September. He had already asked Hindman for an explanation of his actions at McLemore's Cove.<sup>3</sup>

Knowing he needed support from Richmond for any disciplinary measures taken, Bragg wrote a letter to Confederate President Jefferson Davis on 25 September, blaming his delay in moving on Chattanooga to a lack of transportation assets in relation to his increased army. Then, getting to the real intent of the letter, he complained, "But our greatest evil is inefficient commanders. We failed to capture two divisions of the enemy in McLemore's Cove on the tenth, first, by General Hill deciding the movement I ordered

from his command, and fifteen miles from me, impracticable, and failing to execute, then by a direct failure of General Hindman to obey my orders after a force under Buckner had taken the place of Hill.”<sup>4</sup> He added that Polk was a liability in every operation he had been involved in under Bragg’s command. Thus, Bragg was beginning to lay the foundation for a purge of disloyal and incompetent officers from his army. Hill started out on the periphery of the argument, but that would soon change.

In the same letter to Davis, Bragg complained that, “General Hill is despondent, dull, slow and tho’ gallant personally, is always in a state of apprehension, and upon the most flimsy contexts makes such reports of the enemy about him as to keep up constant apprehension, and require constant reinforcements.”<sup>5</sup> Then Bragg concluded his opinion of Hill that must have struck a chord with Davis, “His open and constant croaking would demoralize any command in the world. He does not hesitate at all times and in all places to declare our cause lost.”<sup>6</sup>

Just three months prior, Davis had gone out on a limb and offered Hill a promotion and second chance in the Confederacy. Hill’s payback to Davis was a series of indignant instructions on how to better the conscription system. Davis knew that Hill was no friend of his, yet, against recommendations to the contrary he graciously placed Hill in a key leadership position. In the coming weeks, Davis would be compelled to make changes in Bragg’s army, and Hill would become one of the expendables. He had no strong supporters in Richmond or anywhere outside of North Carolina and was generally disliked by his peers.

Davis honored friendships to a fault. Unfortunately for Hill, he was not Davis’s friend. Davis had developed few friendships in his life and clung to them vigorously.

The few friendships he did have were held with a blind eye. Criticism of his friends would not tarnish his image of them, but instead might stain the image of the critic. Davis had two friends in the Army of Tennessee, Leonidas Polk and Braxton Bragg. Polk and Davis had been friends since their days together at West Point. Bragg's uncompromising loyalty to Davis secured reciprocal allegiance.<sup>7</sup> Regardless of Polk and Bragg's shortcomings, Davis would render both unfailing support and seek a compromise to their differences.

Polk finally responded to Bragg's inquiry on the twenty-eighth. His response was full of partial-truths and innuendoes that deflected any responsibility for the late attack. Instead, he too implicated Hill. Recounting his version of the night of the nineteenth, Polk said "I met with a staff officer of Lieutenant General Hill, to whom I communicated my orders, and from whom I learned that General Hill's headquarters were at Tedford's Ford."<sup>8</sup> Polk, then, insinuated that he told the staff officer of the daylight attack. Yet, Lieutenant Colonel Archer Anderson, the staff officer Polk mentioned claimed that Polk said nothing about a daylight attack, instead saying "Tell General Hill I wish to see him tonight at my headquarters as the fate of the country may depend upon the attack tomorrow."<sup>9</sup>

Continuing his half-truths, Polk went on to say, "I also posted two couriers at the bridge [Alexander's] to keep up fires and inform persons where my headquarters were."<sup>10</sup> Polk failed to mention that his couriers were withdrawn at 2:00 A.M. Hill did not arrive at Alexander's Bridge until after 3:00 A.M. Polk also gave no indication in the deposition that after arriving in Hill's sector he had sanctioned the delay, instead saying, "The order to attack was then repeated and executed."<sup>11</sup> Polk was clearly extricating



himself and his staff from any blame, instead pointing towards Hill and his staff. Though Hill probably did not know the content of Polk's deposition until it was too late to defend himself, after the war he termed Polk's explanation as "ingenious."<sup>12</sup>

To Bragg, Polk's cleverly worded explanation was unsatisfactory. He suspended Polk and Hindman from command on 29 September. Both were sent to Atlanta and told to await further orders. But Bragg had exceeded his authority by suspending two of his subordinates. By law, he was only able to arrest and prefer charges. Davis, moving to defend his West Point friend, reminded Bragg of this fact when he heard what had been done. Davis telegraphed Bragg that the decision to remove Polk should be countermanded. He mentioned nothing about Hindman.<sup>13</sup>

In a letter Davis sent to Bragg on 3 October, he continued to carefully craft his defense of Polk, noting that Bragg should not pursue charges against him because of Polk's popularity and Bragg's lack of the same. Davis' last point in the letter probably convinced Bragg that, although Davis would stand by Polk, Hill was a plausible candidate in Bragg's housecleaning venture:

I am at a loss to see how the delay of one general [Polk] should be regarded as a higher offense than the disobedience of orders by another officer of the same grade [Hill], especially when to the latter is added the other offenses you specify, each giving point to the disobedience charged.<sup>14</sup>

Davis considered Hill an equal culprit to Polk for the miscues on the twentieth. Hill's constant croaking and general insubordination probably elevated his guilt in Davis's mind. Davis did not have an impartial version of events on 20 September. If he had received a full and impartial account he could not have held Hill to the same level of blame as Polk. In his quest to save a friend, Davis probably did not search hard for the truth, as it would have made for a harder decision.

Bragg was not the only general in the Army of Tennessee trying to make changes. While he was busily trying to rid his army of disloyal and incompetent generals, some of those same generals were plotting to remove him as well. In a secret meeting on 24 September, Hill, Polk and Longstreet decided that their efforts to remove Bragg should be elevated to the powers at Richmond. This nearly mutinous act was singular in occurrence for the Confederate army, and would only be bested by the same quorum of officers, less Polk, a few days later. A letter was sent by Longstreet to Confederate Secretary of War James Seddon suggesting that Robert E. Lee immediately replace Bragg and saying, "You will be surprised to learn that this army has neither organization nor mobility, and I have doubts if its commander can give it to them."<sup>15</sup> Polk, likewise, sent a letter to Davis on 27 September blaming Bragg for not pursuing the Federal army into Chattanooga and asked that Bragg be replaced with Lee or Beauregard.<sup>16</sup>

Dissatisfied with the tactful, but noncommittal responses from Richmond, Hill, Longstreet, Buckner and Cheatham gathered again in a meeting so secretive that none of them mentioned it in detail, even after the war. To get the advocacy they desired, it was determined that a petition be drafted on 4 October to President Davis. Understanding the magnitude of such a disloyal action, great care was taken to avoid condemning Bragg's leadership abilities and mistakes. Instead it highlighted his physical ailments as the reason for being unfit to command:

Disclaiming in this paper is any criticism of the actions of their superiors, they desire to limit their representation to a statement of the existing status of affairs in this locality with suggestions which, in their judgement, will serve as a remedy for the existing evils. Two weeks ago this army, elated by a great victory which promised to be the most fruitful of the war, was in readiness to pursue its defeated enemy. . . . Today, after having been twelve days in the line of battle in that enemy's front, within cannon range of his position. . .has seen a new Sebastopol steadily rise before its view. . . . Whatever may have been accomplished

heretofore, it is certain that the fruits of the victory of the Chickamauga have now escaped our grasp. The Army of Tennessee, stricken with a complete paralysis, will in a few days' time be thrown strictly on the defensive, and may deem itself fortunate if it escapes from its present position without disaster. . . . Their reinforcements must be met with corresponding reinforcements to this army. . . . But in addition to reinforcement, your petitioners would deem it a dereliction of the sacred duty they owe the country if they did not further ask that Your Excellency assign to the command of this army an officer who will inspire the army and the country with undivided confidence. Without entering into a criticism of the merits of our present commander, your petitioners regard it as a sufficient reason, without assigning others, to urge his being relieved, because, in their opinion, the condition of his health totally unfits him for the command of an army in the field. . . . Your petitioners cannot withhold from Your Excellency the expression of the fact that under the command, as it now exist, they can render you no assurance of the success which Your Excellency may reasonably expect.<sup>17</sup>

Twelve general officers eventually signed the petition. Polk and Hindman were physically unable to sign it since they had already been sent to Atlanta. Cheatham was the only corps commander who refused to sign it. Breckenridge and Liddell also abstained. In fact, Liddell was so upset by the letter that he correctly told Bragg about it that evening.<sup>18</sup>

Hill was already on Bragg's shortlist for removal and his involvement in this covert coup did nothing to help his standing. The author of the petition will probably never be known, but evidence points to Buckner. After the war, Longstreet claimed that Hill wrote the petition. The petition sat at Hill's headquarters during the next few days because his position was at the center of the Confederate line on Missionary Ridge. Hill denied writing it, but readily admitted to signing it. Hill maintained that Buckner wrote it. The Official Records of the Civil War give credit to Buckner as well. Until his death, Hill maintained that Buckner wrote it. It is probable that Buckner wrote it since his signature was first on the right hand side of the page, the traditional position where one signs a letter.<sup>19</sup>

Whether Hill or Buckner wrote it is irrelevant. What is important is that twelve general officers signed a mutinous petition to oust their commander. Even more disturbing is the fact that it was done in such a shroud of secrecy that little remains known about the meeting or the major catalysts behind it. This was a clear example of peer pressure and poor judgement by all parties involved. There were several other avenues that should have been exhausted before resorting to covert insubordination. As a minimum, they should have approached Bragg directly with the issues and given him a chance to defend himself. As it was, Bragg had no idea that he was being subverted in such depth.

The decision not to submit the petition to Davis probably stemmed from his arrival at Bragg's headquarters on 9 October. In late September, Davis had sent Colonel James Chestnut to investigate the rumblings in Bragg's army. Shortly after Chestnut arrived, he was convinced that the situation warranted Davis's personal attention. On 4 October, he telegraphed Davis to say, "Your immediate presence in this army is urgently demanded."<sup>20</sup> On his way, Davis spent a night in Atlanta visiting his friend Polk.<sup>21</sup> There can be little doubt that Polk took advantage of his personal relationship with Davis to plead his innocence to Davis and blame Hill for the delayed attack on the twentieth.

When Davis arrived, he discussed matters with Bragg to get an initial feel for the magnitude of the problems. After the discussion Davis decided the best course of action would be to tackle the problem head-on in a meeting with the disgruntled corps commanders and Bragg. The meeting began with Davis talking about general military issues and gathering opinions regarding future operations. Then, towards the end of the meeting, he bluntly asked the corps commanders whether Bragg should remain in

command. Longstreet spoke first saying that he did not think Bragg was fit to command. Cheatham and Buckner followed with similar remarks. Hill spoke last. While it is not known what each officer said in their lambasting of Bragg, Longstreet, in his memoirs said that Hill "agreed with emphasis to the views expressed by others."<sup>22</sup>

Despite resounding evidence that Bragg had lost the confidence of his army, Davis would stubbornly stick to his decision to support him. Before he departed, Davis delivered a speech on October 12, praising Bragg's generalship and claiming all opposition towards him was unfounded.<sup>23</sup> With the full support of the president, Bragg had free rein to reorganize his army as he saw fit. At Bragg's request, Davis transferred Polk to Joseph E. Johnston's Alabama-Mississippi Department. On 12 October, while Davis was still with the Army of Tennessee, Bragg wrote a letter to him requesting Hill's relief. "With a view to the more efficient organization and command of this army, I beg you will relieve Lieutenant General Hill from duty with it. Possessing some high qualifications as a commander, he still fails to such an extent in other more essential that he weakens the morale and military tone of his command."<sup>24</sup> Davis consented to Bragg's request and Hill was ordered to administrative duties in Richmond. In the end, Bragg got his way and vindicated his own dismal performance by removing three of his subordinates. Though Hill's performance during the campaign was lackluster, it did not warrant removal.

### Analysis

The conflict-ridden Confederacy had more than its share of turbulent and controversial leaders. Daniel Harvey Hill was at the forefront of this soured group. His personality was a strange mixture of personal discipline, undaunted physical courage and

recklessly harsh criticism of anyone who failed to meet his expectations. A "Rebel" in the truest sense, Hill had an absolute devotion to the Southern Cause and would not compromise his belief that victory was the only option. As he became increasingly doubtful that the Confederacy would succeed, he grew more contentious towards the government for which he was fighting. This led him to openly question and confront any actions that failed to meet his standards. His exaggerated sense of personal honor and dark sarcasm caused him to be generally unpopular within his peer group. In short, Hill was more than willing to criticize and belittle fellow officers' performances and decisions, but refused to accept the same.

Courage and bravery in the face of peril are certainly admirable and necessary qualities for successful combat leaders, but of equal importance is a willingness to accept the decisions of superior officers and work within one's area of responsibility. While many turned a blind eye to that large class of Southerners who remained at home through the Confederacy's exemption program, Hill openly scorned it, even to the point of writing a letter to Confederate President Jefferson Davis requesting a more stringent policy. It was this lack of political savvy that would seal his fate in the Army of Tennessee. While Davis willingly gave Hill a second chance in the West, Hill begrudged Davis for his inability to put more troops and equipment on the battlefield. Hill possessed many of the necessary qualities of a great leader, but his contentious personality was a liability that Bragg and Davis would not overlook.

In every age of warfare, a fuzzy line separates direct leadership from organizational leadership. Nineteenth century warfare allowed direct leadership techniques to be effective all the way up to the division level. Hill was very adroit at

direct leadership; in fact many considered him the premier division commander in the Army of Northern Virginia. Oblivious to danger, he exposed himself to the perils of combat and thus won the admiration and trust of his troops. Corps commanders of the Civil War, however, had to focus more at the operational and strategic level and leave the tactical fight to the divisions.

Hill's performance as a corps commander at Chickamauga was a direct reflection on his personality quirks. His inability to put personal issues aside and work towards a common goal amplified the existing dissension and distrust in the Army of Tennessee. A good follower shores up the weaknesses of his commander and accomplishes the mission, regardless of his personal feelings. In contrast, Hill spent inordinate energy second-guessing Bragg's decisions. Because of his unbending and single-minded attitude, organizational leadership seemed to have slipped from his grasp.

Hill's sarcastic and carping nature caused alienation by his fellow officers. His humor was many times misunderstood. While he knew that his natural personality had a negative effect on his professional relationships, there is little indication that he was inclined to change. Hill was more concerned with his personal reputation and honor than accomplishing the mission. This selfish attitude prevented him from taking any responsibility for the failures at McLemore's Cove and the Battle of Chickamauga. Hill's self-centered pride was his downfall.

Modern leaders must maximize the use of every asset under their control. Trusting relationships must be established quickly with superiors, staffs and subordinate units in order to approach maximum effectiveness. Liaison and active communication up and down the chain of command, as well as laterally, are imperative to success. Negative

experiences with certain organizations or units should not distort the view of the present situation. Hill's distrust of cavalry caused him to react slowly when a quick and vigorous reaction would have yielded almost certain victory at McLemore's Cove.

Hill's performance at the Battle of Chickamauga was much like his performance in the Army of Northern Virginia in the sense that he was continually at odds with his commanding general. Because he argued with Bragg about many issues, he could not influence seem to influence anything of great importance. Had he been more careful in picking his "battles" with Bragg, he may have been more effective in his attempt to shape the outcome of the campaign and battle.

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<sup>1</sup>Thomas Connelly, *Autumn of Glory: The Army of Tennessee, 1862-1865* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1971), 235. (Hereafter cited as *Autumn of Glory*.)

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>Peter Cozzens, *This Terrible Sound*, (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1992), 529.

<sup>4</sup>Hal Bridges, *Lee's Maverick General: Daniel Harvey Hill* (New York, NY: McGraw-Hill, 1961), 227. (Hereafter cited as *Lee's Maverick General*.)

<sup>5</sup>Ibid.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid.

<sup>7</sup>William Davis, *Jefferson Davis, The Man and His Hour: A Biography* (New York, NY: Harper Collins Publishers, 1991), 28-29; Judith Lee Hallock, *Braxton Bragg and Confederate Defeat*, vol. 2, (Tuscaloosa, AL: The University of Alabama Press, 1991), 204.

<sup>8</sup>*The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*, 70 vols. (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1880-1901), Series 1, vol. 30, part 2, 47. (Hereafter cited as *O.R.*)

<sup>9</sup>*O.R.*, vol. 30, part 2, 140; Bridges, *Lee's Maverick General*, 209.



<sup>10</sup>*O.R.*, vol. 30, part 2, 47.

<sup>11</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>12</sup>Bridges, *Lee's Maverick General*, 230.

<sup>13</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup>*Ibid.*, 231.

<sup>15</sup>*O.R.*, vol. 30, part 4, 705.

<sup>16</sup>Connelly, *Autumn of Glory*, 237.

<sup>17</sup>*O.R.*, vol. 30, part 2, 65-66.

<sup>18</sup>Connelly, *Autumn of Glory*, 240.

<sup>19</sup>Bridges, *Lee's Maverick General*, 235-236.

<sup>20</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>21</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>22</sup>James Longstreet, *From Manassas to Appomattox* (Secaucus, NJ: The Blue and Grey Press, 1985), 466.

<sup>23</sup>Connelly, *Autumn of Glory*, 245; Bridges, *Lee's Maverick General*, 238.

<sup>24</sup>Bridges, *Lee's Maverick General*, 240.

## ARMY OF TENNESSEE ORGANIZATIONAL CHART

General Braxton Bragg, commander

### RIGHT WING

Lieutenant General Leonidas Polk

Cheatham's Division

Major General Benjamin Cheatham

Hill's Corps

Lietenant General Daniel Harvey Hill

Cleburne's Division

Major General Patrick Cleburne

Wood's Brigade

Brigadier General S. A. M. Wood

Polk's Brigade

Brigadier General Lucius Polk

Deshler's Brigade

Brigadier General James Deshler

Breckinridge's Division

Major General John Breckinridge

Helm's Brigade

Brigadier General Benjamin Helm

Adams' Brigade

Brigadier General Daniel Adams

Stovall's Brigade

Brigadier General Marcellus Stovall

Walker's Reserve Corps

Major General William H. T. Walker

Walker's Division

Brigadier General States Rights Gist

### LEFT WING

Lieutenant General James Longstreet

Longstreet's Corps

Major General John Hood

McLaws Division

Brigadier General Joseph Kershaw

Hood's Division

Brigadier General E. McIver

Hindman's Division (Polk's Corps)

Buckner's Corps

Major General Simon Buckner

Stewart's Division

Major General Alexander Stewart

Preston's Division

Brigadier General William Preston

Johnson's Division

Brigadier General Bushrod Johnson

CAVALRY COMMANDER

Major General Joseph Wheeler

Wharton's Division

Brigadier General John Wharton

Martin's Division

Brigadier General William Martin

Figure 6.

## ORGANIZATIONAL CHART (continued)

Gist's Brigade  
Brigadier General States Rights Gist

Ector's Brigade  
Brigadier General Matthew Ector

Wilson's Brigade  
Claudious Wilson

Liddell's Division  
Brigadier General St. John Liddell

Liddell's Brigade  
Colonel Daniel Govan

Walthall's Brigade  
Brigadier General Edward Walthall

FORREST'S CAVALRY CORPS  
Brigadier General Nathan B. Forrest

Armstong's Division  
Brigadier General Frank Armstrong

Pegram's Division Colonel  
Brigadier General John Pegram

Figure 6.

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